

# A Good Work In You All

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I'd like us to turn back to Philippians 1 and read again at verse 6 where Paul says, 'And I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.'

Now, very often in our lives, as we follow Jesus together in our lives as Christians, we examine ourselves. We think about how we're getting on. We assess our progress in our walk with Jesus.

Now, sometimes we'll do that very consciously where we'll intentionally and deliberately engage in a process of self-examination, self-reflection and evaluation. And we'll think through the various details of our lives and think about the progress that we're making.

So, sometimes we do it deliberately, but more often, I think, we examine ourselves instinctively or subconsciously. And most of the time, I think that involves looking at ourselves and sighing.

Because very often we feel in our walk as Christians, we feel discouraged, deflated, frustrated. And we feel like we're a long way from where we want to be.

[ 1 : 13 ] And so, I think it's very likely to be the case that for everyone in here who's a Christian, and even for those of you who are maybe not quite sure yet if you're a Christian or not, or where you stand, or what you think in terms of the gospel, I think it's true for everybody that if I ask the question, how are things going in terms of your faith?

Then I think all of us will have the same answer. There's still a lot of work to be done. And that, of course, is actually theologically true.

And we need to remember that the Bible never expects anything else. Because from God's perspective, alarm bells do not go off when we say, 'there's a lot of work still to be done in me.' Alarm bells go off when we say, 'I think I'm the model of everything that a Christian should be.'

That's the kind of mindset that would be much more concerning from God's perspective. And so, whatever stage you're at on your journey as a Christian, whether you're still trying to figure out whether you believe this or not at all, whether you're young in your faith, whether you've been following Jesus for a while, whether you've been following Jesus for years, all of us have room to grow.

For all of us, there's more to learn. For all of us, there's sins that we need to repent and turn away from. There are areas that we need to mature in. There's lots of work still to be done in me, in you, in everyone.

[ 2 : 39 ] So, that's always true. But it's only half the truth. Because although we know that there is still lots of work that needs to be done, Philippians 1.6 is reminding us that so much work has already been done.

And it's absolutely crucial that we remember that. And that's what I want us to think about today. Our title is, 'A Good Work in You All.' And we're just going to walk through this verse together, picking out four key words as our headings.

Began, good, you, and will. We'll unpack each of these one by one. So, first of all, the word began. This word is wonderful for at least two reasons.

It's wonderful because of what is being done, and it's wonderful because of who is doing it. So, in terms of what is being done, Paul tells us that for every person who comes to faith in Jesus, something has begun.

And that's actually crucial for our understanding of the gospel. When we talk about coming to faith, about conversion, about being saved, about being born again, whatever language we use to describe it, when we're talking about that thing that happens to us, we are always talking about a finished beginning.

[ 4 : 06 ] A finished beginning. Now, it's really important to remember that because it corrects the frequent misunderstanding that we can have whereby so many people think that becoming a Christian is about reaching a conclusion, and it's about somehow being the finished article.

So, we set really high standards of knowledge. We think, there's so much I've got to learn. We set really high standards of behavior and self-reform, where we think, I've got to change in all of these different ways. We think, I've got to learn more.

I've got to understand more. I've got to have maturity and competence, knowledge and experience that has to be up here if I'm going to be a Christian.

But coming to Jesus is never about being the finished article. Coming to Jesus, though, is absolutely about a finished beginning.

And the crucial thing that we have to recognize as we think about that is the fact that it is God who does it. It's God who begins the good work in us, and that's why we can call it a finished beginning, because He's the one who does it, not you.

[ 5 : 17 ] He's the one who begins a good work in you. He opens our eyes. He softens our hearts. He awakens us. He draws us. He initiates everything. And when He does so, He sets us on a path of growing and learning and maturing step by step.

But the crucial thing that you've got to remember is that you might feel, as a Christian, that there is still so much work still to be done in you, and that's true. But never forget, the beginning is finished.

And so, yes, the work is not complete, but the beginning is complete. And the reason you can be certain of that is because it's not you that does it.

It's Him. He's the one who begins that good work. And that's why our sense of assurance, which I know that many of us struggle with, the sense of being assured, am I really a Christian?

That sense of assurance is never about you reaching a certain standard of knowledge or experience or competence. That assurance is grounded in God making an irreversible start.

[ 6 : 26 ] Because for every single believer in here today or watching at home, God has begun something in you, and He's not undoing it.

He's not reversing it, and you actually can't muck it up. You can't jiggle it because He starts it. It's His work, and that beginning is finished.

It's complete. And that's incredibly important for all of us to remember. But we might feel today that, oh man, I'm nowhere near where I want to be. That might be true. It's true of me.

But the beginning is complete. God has done it. And it's really important to think of this if you are the person here who struggles with that question, well, am I or am I not actually a Christian?

And lots of people struggle with that question. And people struggle with that question when they're not members of the church, but honestly, even members of the church struggle with that question and think, am I really a Christian?

[ 7 : 24 ] And I know that lots of you feel like that. You feel like you don't know enough or there hasn't been some kind of definitive, clear conversion experience that you can describe. And it's so easy to be waiting for something.

You think, I just need something that'll take away my doubts that's just absolutely crystal clear. And we're waiting for that something that's going to give us a sense of assurance that we're saved.

And we're plagued with the question, have I reached the finishing line? Am I actually saved? Have I made it? These questions haunt us. They're the wrong questions. Because the key question is not, is it all finished?

The key question is, has something started? So is something different? If you compare how you think about God today with how you thought about God 10 years ago, is something different?

If you think about the things that you desire, do you have desires towards God today that you did not have before? Can you see today that you need Jesus in a way that you just couldn't see or understand before?

[ 8 : 48 ] Does the importance of the gospel, which maybe once just bounced off you as you just got on with life, now, does that press your heart? That sense of listen, nothing matters more than this.

And is your desire for other things that once satisfied you or once felt like they were satisfying you, is your desire for those things now a bit smaller? And is your longing for Jesus a bit bigger? All of that tells you that something has started.

Now, all of that's going to be mixed. Everything in our journey as Christians is mixed. And there's the tension in our desires. We long for God, but we also still are attracted towards sin.

Sometimes we feel confident. Other times we feel totally full of doubts and uncertain. And every single step that you take on your journey of faith, you are always going to feel that you've got miles to go.

That is how all of us feel. But I don't know if any of you, you'll all have experienced this. If you've ever gone a car journey with children, maybe you did this as a child. You get into the car, you're heading on a long journey, whether it's away to the mainland or down to Harris, or when I was wee, growing up in town, going to the other side of the world and coming to Carloway.

[ 10 : 04 ] And you get into the car and what does the child ask? Are we nearly there yet? So we always ask, are we nearly there yet? And the answer is nearly always no. There's a long way to go.

But the key thing is this. Nobody asks that question in the house. You only ask that question once the journey started. And if you're thinking, oh man, I'm nowhere near the destination.

I'm not nearly there. There's miles to go. If you're even asking that question, that's a massive, massive hint from the Holy Spirit that you're on the journey. God has started something.

And so if you feel you've got miles to go, if you're conscious today that you know so little, if you are worrying that you don't feel enough towards Jesus, then you actually don't need to worry.

Because all of that's a good sign. The situation where you should worry is if you are sitting here today and you feel nothing.

[ 11 : 11 ] And if that's true of you, you need to pray, Lord, open my eyes and soften my heart.

So God has begun something. Our next word is good. Verse 6 tells us that the thing that God has started is a good work.

Now, if you're a Christian or if you're not yet a Christian, you're not quite sure, this is still so relevant to all of us because it's teaching you two crucial things about what being a Christian involves. The journey where we follow Jesus, there's two crucial things about that we've got to remember.

That journey is positive and it's progressive. Positive and progressive. It's a good work. That's a core basic of the gospel.

Once we come to Jesus, whether that's suddenly or whether it's very gradually, almost imperceptibly, whatever that happens, however that happens, from that point, we go on a journey of growth, gradual growth.

[ 12 : 10 ] Now, the theological term for that is the term sanctification, which is just from the Greek word, well, that's the Latin word, sanctus, which means holy, comes from the Greek word, holy hagios.

It's all like the process of becoming more holy, becoming more and more like Jesus. Holinessification is probably the clearer way for us to explain it, but it doesn't sound as easy to say as sanctification.

That's the theological term and it's always important to remember that in terms of the Christian life, two things always go together. Justification, where our sins are forgiven. Sanctification, where we are restored and healed and helped and enabled to grow more and more like Jesus.

So there's a definitive change when we are converted, our sins are forgiven, and then there's a gradual process whereby we grow more and more in faith, bit by bit by bit.

All of that's by God's grace. We call it double grace, grace to save us, grace to help us grow. It's all fundamental basics about the gospel.

[ 13 : 13 ] And it's so important to remember this, that the process that we go on in our journey is positive and progressive. We must remember this because it's so easy to think that being a Christian is negative and regressive.

And people who aren't Christians can so easily think that this is the case. They think that following Jesus is going to hold you back or it's only even going to take you backwards.

It's going to negatively impact your life. It's going to impose restrictions. It's going to stifle joy. It's going to limit opportunities. It's going to just make things a little bit more rubbish. Some people are put off Christianity because they think it's a total irrelevance, but many other people are put off it because they think that even though it's important, it's depressing.

And sometimes Christians have made it look like that. And that's because even as Christians, we can forget that our journey of faith is positive and progressive.

So we are moving and we are moving in a good direction. Now there's ups and downs on that path all the way. Absolutely, that's the case. But we've got to remember that our journey is positive and progressive because it's so easy to do the other, to misrepresent the gospel, to be a bit doom and gloom either about ourselves or about our circumstances and to feel pessimistic, discouraged, stuck.

[ 14 : 33 ] That contradicts everything that this verse is saying because Paul is telling us that the work that God has begun in you is a good work. So God is doing something good.

And first and foremost, that means that if we think that we are a useless waste of space and that we are absolutely rubbish and that we're totally just a nightmare to God and to everybody else, then we are offending Him because you're His good work.

And secondly, it's reminding us that this work of sanctification, it's not about becoming kind of pious and holier than thou. Absolutely not. It's about having a massively positive impact on our lives, our families and all the people that we interact with.

So more sanctification means more joy, more kindness, more enthusiasm, more patience, more generosity, more confidence, more security, more wisdom, more courage, more endurance and more love.

That is what the journey of sanctification is intending to bring. And if you think that Christianity is dull, then you do not know what you're rejecting because it makes such a massively positive impact on our lives.

[ 15 : 53 ] And as we go along that journey, God, as we're saying, is making that positive progression. And so this is what's so important. God is never, ever, ever looking for perfection in you.

But He is looking for progress and we are looking for progress. And sometimes that progress is rapid, sometimes it's very, very slow. Sometimes it can come through pleasant, wonderful experiences. Sometimes it comes through avocados and spinach, things that are not so pleasant but are helpful.

Sometimes pain can be the period where we grow the most. The key point is that in it all, God is working. He's progressing you forward. He's teaching you. He's building you up.

He's working on something beautiful. But it's crucial that we remember that in this work of sanctification, in this pathway, we are participants, not passengers.

So we're participants, not passengers. So what I'm trying to say there is that sanctification is by God's grace. So everything, we depend on God's grace.

[ 16 : 56 ] But that grace is needed to counter our helplessness, not to accommodate our laziness. So grace helps us where we are helpless.

But it doesn't pander to us when we're lazy. And so we mustn't, whilst we emphasize God's grace at every step, we mustn't just sort of shrug our shoulders and think, well, God has to do it.

I'm not even going to bother trying. No, we honor God and we honor His grace by recognizing that we're completely helpless without Him. But with His grace, we are empowered and enabled to grow and learn and to make wonderful, positive progress.

And so we would like, I don't know if you've ever, if you've ever taught a child to ride a bike. When they first start off, you need to go along beside them and push them along. Now, they're helpless without you. But if they just sit on their bike and just sort of flop and you just push them all the way, nothing, there's no progress there at all.

But if they are trying to pedal, even though their legs aren't strong enough and even though they're wobbly, if they are trying to pedal and you are helping them along, then they will thrive and grow and achieve amazing things.

[ 18 : 08 ] And so we, we recognize our dependence on grace, but we actively participate in seeking to cooperate with all that God is directing us towards as He helps us and empowers us.

And one of the key ways that God helps us to make progress in our Christian lives is through what we call the means of grace. That's a very old-fashioned term. We talk about the means of grace.

Now, what we basically mean by that when we say means of grace, we are basically talking about the, I like to use the word channels, the channels which God has appointed through which He's going to bless us and help us.

They're the means, the channels through which He blesses us. And there are several. Coming to church together, that's a channel through which God will bless us. Singing together is a channel through which God will bless us.

Reading the Bible, whether alone or together, in small groups or as a big group like this, that's a channel through which God will bless us. Fellowship together, spending time talking and enjoying each other's company.

[ 19 : 13 ] And preaching, listening to God's word preach, all of that is an appointed means by God through which He is going to bless you. And these means of grace are the channels through which He does a wonderfully positive work in our lives.

That's why you can go into this week expecting to make positive progress in your faith. You can go into this week thinking, in seven, in eight days' time when we're back here, I will have grown.

I will be further on. I will be more mature. I will be a little bit stronger. You might not feel like that, but that is exactly the work that God's Spirit is seeking to do. And that should be our normal basic posture, the expectation that a good work is being done.

We are making positive progress. Our third word is you. Now, a lot of what we're saying just now, this is a really important and a fascinating word to have, to think about because in all of what we're saying, a lot of what we're focusing on is thinking about each of us as individuals as we follow Jesus.

And so that personal journey is something that every single one of us needs to think about. So wherever you are, here at home, wherever you are in terms of faith, either totally sceptical or you've been striving to follow Jesus for decades or wherever you are in between, all of us have, as individuals, we have a next step to take.

[ 20 : 43 ] All of us always have a next step to take. And that's immensely important to think about. The gospel is speaking to us as individuals. We need to respond as individuals. All of you got a next step.

I've got a next step. Let's take the next step with God's help. So the individual focus is important. But the key thing I want us to notice about this word, you, is that it's plural.

English doesn't have a different word for singular you and plural you, apart from y'all if you're from America or yous if you're a townie. But Greek is a different word, just like Gaelic does, for singular you and plural you.

And this you is plural. And now that might just be, you know, Paul speaking to numerous individuals in Philippi, and it's true that God's began a good work in each one of them.

But I think that this verse is also teaching us that the good work that God is doing, the good work that He's begun, is a collective work that's been done and accomplished in the family of God together.

[ 21 : 57 ] And so the you all, the yous of 1-6 is speaking to us about the good work that God's doing in us all as a church family. And the reason I think we can push that quite strongly is because if you look at verse 6 here, it comes in between verse 5 and verse 7, both of which speak quite collectively.

So you've got partnership in the gospel in verse 5, you've got Paul speaking about you all in verse 7. The big emphasis here is about his collective message to the church family there in Philippi.

So the good work that God has begun has been worked out in the church family collectively. And this is raising a crucial point that we do not think or talk about nearly enough.

It's reminding us that as we come together each week, as we look at one another, as we press on together side by side, God is doing a brilliant work among you all.

God is doing a brilliant work in and through all of you. Now very often ministers like me will gather you here every week and I'll tell you about the things that you need to do differently and I'll highlight the areas where we need to grow and our evening service just now in Titus, there's a lot of that, we need that and it's helpful and so we do want God's word to expose where we need to change and sometimes we maybe even need to be rebuked by God's word, we want to recognise the life that Jesus is calling us to as we follow him.

[ 23 : 32 ] We come each week in confession of sin, in repentance, wanting to turn back to the Lord and follow him. It's always a lot that we want to change, it's always good to aim for the good works through which God will be honoured in our lives but God is also honoured when we recognise and rejoice in the good work that he is already doing among you and I just want to take this opportunity to say that when I look out over all of you here today and I look out over all of you each week, there are so many ways in which God's good work is happening and I'm going to give you lots of examples.

Every week we come here together and we sing, your singing is amazing, it's so energising and the name of God is praised as we lift up our voices together. There are so many ways in which you serve, last week at the wedding was an amazing example, fed 160 people, just like that and in so many other ways you are serving both the church family and serving in the community with all the different things that you're involved in.

Your commitment is amazing. I come here each week and the reason that I'm not speaking to an empty building is because you are committed to come. You are praying and every week we come together on a Thursday evening to pray but I know every day you are praying.

I'm so thankful for that, that's such an important work. The friendship that we enjoy and share in our church family here both our own congregation and with the congregation beside us is so precious. You are unbelievably generous.

There are so many things that we've accomplished in this church. We've renovated the whole building, we've supported mission work overseas and locally. You kept me in a salary, you've done so much all because you are generous, you're incredibly kind, you're so hospitable, there's so many wonderful times we've enjoyed meals together.

[ 25 : 22 ] We laugh together, it's amazing, there's so many moments of joy. We stick together in moments that are tough. There are so many times that you have encouraged one another and encouraged me.

There are so many times that you have been courageous in making changes and in trying to take forward the gospel and in trying to reach out to the community and there are so, so many beautiful ways that you again and again and again have demonstrated your love for Jesus, for me, for one another, for our community.

God is doing a good work among you and it's so important and so good to recognize that and to rejoice in it.

I should have also said patience because I never finish at 12 and you're always patient but we're almost done. Last of all, we've got the word will. So the verse is speaking about what God has initiated, it's speaking about the positive progress that he's taking us on, it's calling us to recognize and rejoice in the good things that are already happening and finally this verse points to the future.

He who began a good work and you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Paul is constantly thinking about eternity. So Paul who wrote this letter and who wrote many other letters, if you read the letters that Paul wrote, you will barely go five or six verses when he does not say something that points you towards eternity.

[ 26 : 53 ] And that's so wise because for everybody who trusts in Jesus, it's eternity where ultimate answers will come. It's eternity when every bruise will be healed and every tear will be wiped away.

It's eternity when all distress and anxiety will finally be gone. It's eternity when all broken things will be restored, relationships will be healed.

It's eternity when we will experience the joy and peace and fullness of love that we long for now. And so Paul had a brilliant perspective on today because he had such a good perspective towards eternity.

And the great emphasis here is that what God has started and what God is continually and progressively doing in us, he is absolutely going to bring to completion when Jesus returns.

In other words, God has started something in you and he is not giving up. Sanctification is a work of God and that is a work that he is irrevocably committed to.

[ 27 : 58 ] And that is so important for us to remember. When we think about his good work of sanctification, when we think about that good work that God is doing, he initiates it, he progresses it, and he guarantees its completion, and none of those are maybes.

They are all absolute certainties. And that has two magnificent consequences for you right now if you're a Christian or if you become a Christian. Number one, it means that right now you can relax.

Now I don't mean relax as in be lazy, I mean relax in that you don't need to worry. You don't need to be scared because you are safe and secure, sealed and certain in the perfect work of God.

You are not a maybe in God's eyes. You're not on the standby list. You're not on probation. You are totally and utterly and eternally safe and secure in him.

That word will, that magnificent word will is describing the eternal, unchangeable, irrevocable, determination of God to save you and make you his.

[ 29 : 09 ] And as you think about that, you can take a deep breath and relax. And secondly, at the same time, if you are a Christian or if you become one, it means that right now you should be very, very excited because everything that you experience now that is good and true and right and honourable and precious and beautiful is just a glimpse, it's just a fortune foretaste of the perfection that we will experience when Jesus takes us home.

The good that we experience now is going to be so, so much better then. And so the moments of fulfilment and joy and energy and motivation and security and completeness and purity and vibrancy and love that you experience now and that are so precious, they are going to be massively amplified in the new creation when Jesus comes to take home all who are trusting in Him.

Right now, all you and I have capacity for is a began, a beginning. But when Jesus returns and when He raises us and conforms us to His image, then we will be ready for much, much more than just a began.

we will experience the perfections of the goodness that God has determined to share with us all. And that's why it's no wonder that just a few verses later Paul says, when I think about dying, to be with Christ is far, far better.

God's I will is never, ever, ever an I might. What He began, He will complete.

[ 31 : 02 ] You are His workmanship and He's never, ever giving up. But I guess the big thing is this. God's coming to you with an I will.

Please don't respond to Him with an I might. Instead, let's all of us, whether it's our first step of faith or our 30,000th step of faith, let's go on from today following Him, trusting Him, loving Him, serving Him.

Amen. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.