

Bon Appétit Course 4: Take-Away - Apply – Philippians 2:12-16 David Bawks - Pathway Community Church (Feb 28, 2021)

Welcome to week 4 of our series on how to study the Bible called **Bon Appétit**, as we compare the experience of having a four course meal with our experience in reading the Bible. The four courses we are looking are an appetizer, a salad, a main course and then a take away we bring home to eat later. In this example, these **four courses** match with **four steps** in studying the Bible – 1) **reading**, 2) **understanding**, 3) **explaining**, 4) **applying**. This month we are focusing especially on moving past just an appetizer and appreciating all the other courses, the other steps of studying the Bible carefully.

After the appetizer, we had our salad, which is the step of understanding what a passage actually says. This can often be the longest and most difficult of all the four steps. But just like a salad, although it is not always the exciting dish to eat, it is healthy and very rewarding. This step is a lot of work and thought, but it is well worth it. We looked at 5 questions of our text that we then used for our main course, explaining what the passage means. Last week we focused on this course of explaining, and we summarized the main point of our passage, how it fits into the Bible's overall message, how it compares to other passages, and what general truths we can learn from a passage. This is where a lot of the meat and the substance of a meal come from and the same is true in studying the Bible.

Today we finally reach our fourth and final course – the take-away. This is where the rubber meets the road, as they say. This is how we live out this passage. Please turn with me once more to our passage for this month, **Philippians 2:12-16**:

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 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 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. NIV

Before we get to our fourth course, let's review what we said last week. We answered four questions last week – main point, overall Bible message, other Bible passages, and general theological truths. Here is our summary of the main point of the passage: **As we work out our salvation, we must live in harmony resulting in lives of light and purity.**

That's what our passage is telling us. We also mentioned that **You can't work out what God hasn't first worked in.** The work we are commanded to do depends completely on what God has already done for us.

Now we come to our fourth course, our take-away. These are the three questions we are looking at today.

4.1 Situation – similar or different

4.2 Warning, example, command or promise?

4.3 How can this passage help us to grow in faith and disciple others?

We'll begin with our first question.

4.1 How is our situation today similar or different from that faced by the original readers?

Similarities – we live in an urban region of wealth, power and significance, we also need encouragement, we are still in need of salvation, we also struggle with grumbling and complaining, we also stand out from those around us

Differences – geography, culture, time period, very different position in the history of the church

To get a sense of the original context Paul was writing to, “Philippi was a city with a population of some 10 to 15,000 (not all Roman citizens) in a magnificent 120 acre urban area (exhibiting a wealth disproportionate to its size), dominated by a small Roman elite descended from original veteran settlers....” (Gordon Zerbe, <https://directionjournal.org/38/2/citizenship-and-politics-according-to.html>) The church was a small church, described by one scholar as “a struggling and threatened assembly of between thirty and eighty individuals (including children)”, and one of Paul’s main intentions was to encourage them (Gordon Zerbe, <https://directionjournal.org/38/2/citizenship-and-politics-according-to.html>). Part of the reason the church was struggling is that they were living in a context that demanded worship of Roman gods and the emperor, and refusing to participate in these religious practices would probably have led to both social and economic exclusion. They lived in a **Roman city hostile to the Christian faith**. They were part of an empire that would eventually, and had indeed already started—as can be evidenced by Paul’s arrest—actively oppose and persecute the spread of Christianity. We don’t have the same type of persecution here in the Bay Area, but we do face significant cultural opposition to the claims of the gospel, that is likely to continue to increase with the passage of time. As I said last week, we also live in a warped and crooked generation that does not hold to the moral standards of God.

Paul is writing to encourage the Philippian church to remain loyal to the Messiah in spite of persecution and other consequences. Gordon Zerbe writes that Paul is pushing the assembly in Philippi “to retain the Messianic citizenship virtues of lowliness, neighborliness, and unity in contrast to Roman consumerist, status-pursuing, and self-promoting glory, along with its general immorality” (<https://directionjournal.org/38/2/citizenship-and-politics-according-to.html>). That contrast continues to apply so clearly to us in the Bay Area. That is why Paul emphasizes contentment, joy, and living in community.

4.2 Is there a warning to be heeded, an example to follow, a command to be obeyed or a promise to trust?

Warning – against grumbling and complaining,

Example – Paul, his commitment to raising up disciples in the churches he started

Command – Two - We must work out our salvation, and we must do everything without grumbling or complaining. Those are two direct commands.

Promise – not a direct promise, but a principle that if we obey the commands, the result will be us being blameless and pure, lights in a dark place

4.3 How can this passage help us to grow in faith and disciple others?

This is our final question, and I’ll answer this question broadly to see how we can live out this passage. Remember our main point from last week: **As we work out our salvation, we must live in harmony resulting in lives of light and purity.**

This raises the question, **how do we work out our salvation?** What does this mean practically? Last week I gave the example of building a house, using the land and the parts that God has purchased and given to us. Here are a few suggestions that I have as to how we work out our salvation:

1) Pursue God with everything

We are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and this requires **passion** and **effort**. I became a Christian when I was young, when I was about 4 I went to my parents' bedroom one night and I prayed with them to accept Christ because I had seen people doing that and I wanted to make sure it was true for me, that I wouldn't miss out and go to hell. But that was just the beginning of a long journey for me. Paul tells the Philippians that they must work out their salvation with fear and trembling, and I know that was true for me.

Once I could read, I read through the entire Bible from beginning to end, and I was mainly interested in something that would give assurance of my salvation, confidence to overcome the fears and the doubts I have. But it took me years and years before I overcame that fear. I remember I used to pray every night, for years, Lord make me your servant. But I was never really sure if that was true, if God had done it or now, or if I needed to keep asking. Finally, when I was about 11 years old, I decided that I could change my prayer, and that I could switch to this: Lord make me a good servant, and I was no longer afraid of if it applied to me or not, but I moved to focus on growth as a Christian.

In regards to **fear**, there are **two verses** that I find helpful in understanding the role of fear in the Christian life – Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, and then from 1 John 4:18: There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. Fear is natural, and to an extent it is healthy as we work out our salvation – God is holy, and powerful, and we need to show proper reverence and respect, even as we fear God's power and ability. But our fear should diminish as we grow in the relationship, as we grow in love and in intimacy with God. But it is natural to be afraid when we come face to face with God – because God is God, and we are not.

As we pursue God with everything, we have to learn and practice **spiritual disciplines** – meditation, fasting, giving, simplicity, solitude, intercessory prayer, and hearing from God. These take habit, discipline, waking up early, sometimes staying up late, setting aside time, and giving everything that we have. I've been reading more on spiritual disciplines the last few years and seeking to use as many ways as I can to pursue God with my devotional time. Learn from others who have more experience with God, find out what they do, and imitate them as much as you can. If you write down your prayers, your prayer journal can in some ways become a **personalized blueprint to guide us as we assemble** the house we're building, and the church congregation we are all a part of. So continue to work out your salvation in fear and trembling, and **record the process as you go**.

2) Live your life in community

Last week I said that Paul commands all of us to work out our salvation together, not just as individuals. I've put this point broadly, because I want to include all the ways that we live life together intentionally. I believe that lack of connection and lack of community is one of the greatest problems that people in the Bay Area face, and the pandemic has only made this worse. Living in community is the opposite of self-promotion, both in Roman times and today. In moving here, building meaningful and genuine community is one of my top goals, both personally and as a church. This has been quite a bit more difficult and much slower than I had anticipated.

If you're not a part of a life group, then please sign up on our website or email me at david@pathwayfremont.org. If you are hesitant to join a long-term group, you can join an eight-week group starting this Wednesday evening exploring the letter to the Colossians. We'll have other groups starting up later this year as well, but I'd love for you to join us as we jump into this letter and see how we can live it out in our lives today. A healthy group should include caring for each other as we go through challenges and victories, and serving together in helping those in need.

As we meet together, we must go beyond simply studying the Bible and making sure we are doing what the Bible says. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to accumulate knowledge, to learn and to discuss different passages, but not to live them out. We must avoid this tendency. A healthy life group means working out our salvation together, and that means sharing our questions, and putting in the effort of building the elements of faith and understanding into something that makes sense, and something that bears fruit. It means doing a service project together, helping a neighbor or a school in need, doing evangelism, and building each other up as well.

As we invite people to accept Christ and walk with them on their journey of salvation, we must be sure to explain clearly to them clearly that salvation is both a gift and a task, as we said last week. Salvation requires all of us working together, but only because God has given it graciously and freely to all of us.

But a life group is only one way to live in community. I've talked about discipleship in terms of meeting regularly with one people, praying together, and talking about how to grow deeper in our Christian faith. Each of us should also If you don't have a mentor, ask someone you respect if they can meet regularly with you, guide you on your journey. Ask people who are your age, in years or in faith, also to be meeting with you for fellowship and accountability. And then reach out to those who are younger than you in the faith and invite them to walk this journey together, to share with them what you've seen God do in your life, and what God has taught you. That's discipleship.

3) Commit to living a no-grumbling life

The easiest way to **destroy** and **damage** a community is by grumbling about each other. Last week we talked about this in our post-service discussion, and about how easy it can be to grumble about what is going wrong.

What is your response when you are upset with someone? Do you approach them first, or someone else? Especially in the past this has been a problem for me, and I haven't always honored people by the way I talk about them when they are not there. I have gotten better over time at being able to approach someone directly when there is a problem, instead of ignoring it or avoiding it as I was more likely to do before.

Let's commit to a no-grumbling life, and to addressing issues directly with the person involved. I believe this commitment will play a **tremendous role in whether we continue to grow, to thrive and to impact the Fremont area**. I would ask all of us to commit **to be real about the problems we face**, the **challenges** we have, and the **disagreements** we have with people. Let's commit **to honor people** with what we say when they are not there, and to go to them directly whenever we have any issue.. Let's be real with each other, and not exploit each other's weaknesses by spreading them to anyone who will listen.

When I say no-grumbling, I don't at all mean that we **downplay our challenges**, or just keep quiet when things are not well. That would lead to an inauthentic community where people don't share their real selves. So I hope that we all feel free and safe enough to share our struggles with one another, and also open enough to have difficult conversations.

I also know that as a church there are so many things we could do better. I sometimes feel so **overwhelmed** because I imagine all the things we could do as a church, all the ministries we could do, the impact we could have, but we have only done a tiny amount. I'm sure you have also seen gaps, and things we've missed. I'm sure there are things that were going really well before I came to Pathway, and they aren't being done now, or being done well, and for a lot of that I'm not even aware of what they are. But if you've seen those gaps, I hope as much as possible that we can recruit you to help us to fix them.

Filling in gaps reminds me of an experience I had when I was a student in seminary in Kenya and I was on the student government, which involved a lot of things I did not expect. At one point I was in charge of the student council cows, we owned nine, and I had to decide how to set the price of the milk, when they should be inseminated, of which I was deeply uninformed, and other decisions I did not at all expect. It was a very interesting experience. I remember one time I was out shopping and I got a call from our farm manager, who was very distressed. He said, sir, they are shooting the cows. I said, what? Who is shooting the cows? What do you mean? It turns out that a filming company that was renting some space on our compound was filming the cows with a camera, but no cows were harmed. At least not then – afterwards we did slaughter one and sell the meat to the students.

Anyway, to get back to the point I remember at our public meetings as the student body there was one guy in particular who always had a lot to say about our work as student council, like we're not doing enough, this is not working, and so on. I remember trying to explain all the work that was happening behind the scenes, but he wasn't convinced. He had strong opinions about most things. We used to actually prepare our presentations with him in mind, like what would he say about this. Then the next election, we recruited him to join us, and he became a class rep. He then sat in our council meetings, and after the first meeting, he stopped complaining – and he said at one point, you know this is a lot harder than I thought. I never realized all the work that goes into these decisions. He had become a part of the process, and our public meetings became a lot quieter and smoother. Not only that, but we gained from all of his experience and his perspective.

If you see a problem or an opportunity for us, then I hope you can be the one who helps us to solve the problem or take advantage of a new opportunity that comes our way.

But a no-grumbling approach to life goes beyond our church life. We need to pursue it in all our relationships and aspects of life. Grumbling doesn't just damage community, it also sours our individual experience of life. If you constantly complain about things that are wrong in your life, your life will soon become joyless. It makes our perspective of life small by focusing only on the negative and we end up missing out on so much else that is good and that God is doing in our lives and around us.

Conclusion

Wow, so we have come to the end of our four course meal! We have sampled our appetizer by reading our passage, taken our salad by asking detailed questions so that we understand what precisely it is saying, and feasted on our main course by explaining as clearly as we can what Philippians 2:12-16 means. Today we had our take-away by looking at four ways we can grow in our faith and make disciples, based off these verses. These are the three things we've said:

- 1) Pursue God with everything**
- 2) Live your life in community**
- 3) Commit to living a no-grumbling life**

Please know that these are only a few ways we can apply these verses. There is so much more I could say, so many parts of these verses I didn't even mention, and even more that each of you could add to how we live this out. I'd like us to take a few minutes to debrief, and share how this month has been for us. What have we learned about the four courses of studying the Bible? How can you apply Philippians 2:12-16? What does this passage mean in your life, in your house, in your work?