

Gracious God and most holy Heavenly Father, we do adore you this evening. We worship you and magnify your holy name, and we can barely believe that you would speak to us, not only so you would give your Son, the Lord Jesus, to us. And so as we open up your scripture this evening, would you also send forth your Holy Spirit, that we might understand your word, that we might know that it's coming to us as the very breath of God for our teaching and reproof and correction and training and righteousness, and that we might leave here thoroughly furnished for every good work. We pray it all in Christ's name. Amen. Please be seated. Well, if you have your Bible, please turn with me to Philippians. We're going to begin a series this summer. Dr. Stewart is very gracious to ask Josh Squires and I to preach the next 10 weeks. I'll be doing June and Josh will do July. And we're going to look at the book of Philippians. which is a fantastic letter from Paul in Rome in a prison to this great church that he loves. We've titled it Firm Foundations Standing Together in Christ, and you can tell that we already want to say too much. In 10 weeks, we will have to do some flying over. Dr. Thomas texted me this morning and said, you're preaching Philippians. It took Stephen Lawson 42 sermons. We're going for ten. So you're gonna get three for the price of one every Sunday. And I take three for the price of one anywhere nowadays, so buckle up, enjoy, let's feast together. We're gonna start here in chapter 1 and we'll look at 1 through 11. Again, this could be a few sermons but we'll, we'll hit some high notes and see what the Lord has for us. Let's give attention to God's Word in Philippians 1, 1 through 11. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 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. It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart. For you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. Thanks be to God for His holy and errant and therefore authoritative words. Well, first impressions and first words are important. Perhaps you remember the first impression that your spouse made upon you, or the first impression

that you made upon your spouse, and you can hardly believe that you were accepted afterwards. Or the first words that you said to your spouse, whether it was a cheesy pickup line like, I've been noticing you, noticing me, noticing you all night. Or perhaps it was a more sincere endeavor, like, I've noticed that you're a really godly person and I'd love to get to know you better. In the army, there's a saying that first impressions are the lasting impressions. And perhaps you know that to be true. You cringe at the first impression you made to someone and you think, I can never get that back. Or you know someone that made a bad first impression. I remember having a friend in Nashville that other people would say, he makes a really bad first impression. But he grows on you. Or famous first lines, like it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Charles Dickens in A Tale of Two Cities. Or it is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife. Pride and Prejudice. Or four score and seven years ago, Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address. Or I Have a Dream, Martin Luther King, I Have a Dream speech. That great Presbyterian movie. In our family, there is no clear line between religion and fly fishing. A river runs through it. And the same is true of a letter, though letters are somewhat increasingly outdated, though some of you don't want to acknowledge that reality. And texts have become all the rage, though some of you only think that's the reality, and surely the gospel can bridge the gap between those two parties. Letters in the ancient Near Eastern world had a customary greeting and salutation and introduction, and oftentimes that introduction was infused with some thanksgiving, and Paul's letters are no different in that sense. Though he gives us clues when he writes a letter in the introduction to where he's going. Think of maybe a syllabus in a classroom setting, and it's not the class itself, but it's telling you the pieces that you're gonna cover, the components that you're gonna cover in the course. This introduction has a similar sense to it to a syllabus as Paul is putting forward to us some clues of where he's going with the gospel message here. But it's filled with a gospel goodness about it. It's not just an introduction. It's filled with a gospel goodness that we can glean from. And what I want us to notice tonight is three things. I want us to remember our identity in Christ. I want us to remember our story in Christ. And finally, I want us to remember our purpose in Christ. First here in verses one and two, remembering our identity in Christ. How do you introduce yourself? We love a good introduction of the South, don't we? And especially in a Southern historic church like this one, we take it to the next level. My name is so and so, insert important last name. And my wife is so-and-so, insert important, last maiden name. And her family is so-and-so, insert important name, and they had five kids, and their kids

had X amount of kids, and on and on and on, and we can really date our whole family back to the founding of this church. And we have a lot of reasons to be thankful for that, and celebrate that reality. Introductions matter to us, and for good reason, because we're thankful for the Lord's story and heritage in our lives, but when Paul gives an introduction, Christ is at the center. And it's interesting here in verses one and two, really in verse one here, that he does a couple things in his introduction. First, he shares his introduction with another, with Timothy. It's not just about Paul, it's about Timothy and their ministry together. You'll remember Timothy in Acts 16 when Paul was passing through Derbe and Lystra, he comes upon Timothy. And Timothy is the son of a Jewish mother and the son of a Greek father, and he's converted under Paul's ministry. He quickly becomes the son of the faith to Paul. And it's amazing how immediately Timothy joins Paul and Silas and Luke at the time in their ministry endeavors. This is their second missionary journey. And they want to go to Asia, but they're prohibited, the scripture says, by the Holy Spirit. And so in a vision in the night, a man from Macedonia appears and says, come over to us and help us. And immediately they go. They set sail and the first city they come to is Philippi. And Timothy is actually beloved in Philippi. They fall in love with Timothy. They actually want Timothy to come back and minister to them, but Paul can't bear it. He's in prison in Rome. He doesn't know if he's gonna live or die. He does end up living. But he needs Paul. He needs his son in the faith, who no doubt is ministering to him in his imprisonment as his father in the faith, and he won't allow him to go back. That's part of the reason he's writing the letter, is to say, I can't spare Timothy. I'm sending back to you Epaphroditus, who had brought him a letter and a gift. from the church at Philippi, but he shares his introduction with his brother, his son in the faith, but more importantly what he does here is he skips his normal apostolic introduction. And this is giving us a clue to where he's going. Instead of referring to himself as he could, an apostle of Christ Jesus to the church at Philippi, he refers to he and Timothy as servants. Servants of Christ Jesus. Indeed, they do serve Christ Jesus, but the Greek word douloi from the word doulos is more impactful. It actually means slaves. The way in which Paul sees himself and his ministry endeavor and his relationship with Christ is that he is a slave to a master. Slaves owe their masters absolute and unquestioned obedience. Slaves belong absolutely to the ownership of their masters. And perhaps that sounds harsh to you. But to Paul, he understands who he is in Christ. that Christ has not only become to him a savior, of course he is that, but he is also Lord, which means ruler, master, to whom he owes absolute obedience,

absolute allegiance. Here is the founder of this church, the apostle, who could name any title he wants, and he chooses to call himself a slave. He's gonna point back to that when he calls them to be slaves of Christ, to be humble and following Christ. He understands what we need to understand. And that is that we are slaves to the greatest master in the world who loves us and gave himself for us as a ransom for our sins. And when we understand that reality, we want to give him the allegiance and the obedience that's due his name as our great master, to love him, to serve him, and to identify with him. But he goes further in our identity, not just that we're slaves, but he says at the end of verse one, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons. We don't have time to get into saints a ton, the holy ones, the set apart ones. He's not talking to a general class of Christians, but to Christians in general, that all Christians are saints, all Christians are holy to the Lord, set apart by Him. But the emphasis here is that they're in Christ Jesus. And this is Paul's favorite way of referring to what it means to be a Christian. Over a hundred times in his letters, he speaks of being in Christ or in Christ Jesus or in him or in the beloved. He loves to talk about the fact that our true identity is not that we own this last name. It's not that we live in Columbia.

It's not that we're a part of First Presbyterian Church. It's not that we work where we work. It's not that we play where we play. It's not the achievements that we've had in our lives or even the failures that we've experienced. It's that if we're a Christian, we are in Christ Jesus. And that means that the perfect life that he lived has become our perfect life. And that the death he died on the cross canceled our sins. And that when he rose from the dead, we rose with him to new life. And that when he ascended into heaven, it's as if we sit with him now in those heavenly realities in our core identity. And that when he comes back for us in glory, we will be with him in glory forever. We will be like him in glory forever. That if we are Christians, what we need to know about ourselves is that who we really are is in Christ, in union and communion in Christ. I wonder what impact that would have upon you if you were to truly meditate upon it on a regular basis. It's been said that we really can't meditate upon two things at the same time. Can't meditate upon our grocery list and the text message we're trying to send at the same time or we'll get the wrong groceries. We can't meditate upon the baseball game in front of us while our wife is telling us about her day, sorry. We can't meditate upon our golf swing and what we need to do to fix it in the midst of the pastoral prayer. I know you've never done that. We can't meditate upon ourself and our selfless desires while meditating upon the fact that

Christ is glorious and wonderful and gazing upon his excellencies at the same time. But what would it look like if in the morning when we rise, we meditate upon Christ? Daily, we meditate upon Christ. In our work, we meditate upon Christ. In our lunch appointments, we meditate upon Christ. When we're with our family, when we're with our friends, when we're with our neighbors, when we're at the beach, when we're at the mountains, when we're tailgating, wherever we are, we're meditating upon Christ and the reality that we are in Christ. It would change our focus. It would change our lifestyle. It would change our purpose. It's not unimportant though that not only are they in Christ, they're also at Philippi. As if the Lord puts a pin in a map and says, this is where you'll be. Or drops a pebble in a pond and there's a ripple effect from the fact that you lived there, you were there, that you were put there. Why are you here and not there? Why are you at First Prez in Columbia, South Carolina and not at Second Prez in Memphis, Tennessee? Why are you here now? It says, Paul says at the Areopagus in Acts 17, because God made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined the allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place. You're here because God by His grace placed you right here in this time for such a time as this. And it's not unimportant that you're in Christ this city and he says you belong to the church with the overseers and deacons and we don't have time to get in this a ton but he's he's pointing to the officers of the church the overseers the Episcopal the the bishops elders it's the same word used in in the Greek the the elders being the wisdom and sagemess, if that's a word, and godliness and spiritual leadership of the officers of the church, and bishop being the role that they play as overseers, it's the same thing. And deacons, the ones who serve at table, as he's gonna speak to Jesus doing later on in Philippians 2, you're in Christ, in this city, in the church, for such a time as this. And in the midst of that such a time, you need help. That's as the author of Hebrews says, that we can draw near to the throne of grace to receive grace and mercy in time of need, to help us in time of need. What do we need here? We need grace and peace. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We need grace that saves and grace that sustains. Grace that strengthens us to live out the Christian life in a godless world. And we need peace, that wholeness, that rightness with the Lord and with ourselves. We need godliness to live out our lives in this world from the Father and the Son and implied through the Holy Spirit What a greeting. We could talk about that for a long time. It's your identity in Christ, and you need to remember it. Secondly, we need to remember our story in Christ. In verses three through eight,

Paul says, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy. Joy is a theme of this letter, it comes out 10 times specifically, 15 times in an explicit manner. There are flocks that are not a joy to their minister. And there are ministers that are not a joy to their flock. It happens all the time. That's not the case at Philippi. They loved Paul so much so that they weren't ashamed of him when he was in prison. Even if they didn't know if the gospel was advancing there and his ministry was thwarted there, it's not, but they didn't know that. They're not ashamed of him. They love their minister and their minister loves him. When he thinks about them, it brings him great joy and love. And that's the case in our history, isn't it? We can go back as far as the history goes and we'll see ministers who brought joy to their flock and a flock who brought joy to their ministers all the way to today with Dr. Stewart and with this flock. That's what Paul is experiencing here, such a joy that it stimulates him to pray for them. And it's interesting here, he's not just praying in general, Lord, would you bless everybody at the church? Although that's fine. But it says that he is praying for you all, as if Paul has pulled out his prayer card and it has every name of the members of the church at Philippi. Lydia, Euodia, Syntyche, on and on and on. the officers, the overseers, the other ministers who are laboring in their care. His joy stimulates his prayer, and that's what ministers ought to do. That's what happens with the apostles. In Acts 6, they devoted themselves to the preaching and to the prayer for the people. And the people ought to also pray for their officers. It's a joyful love for one another that stimulates intercession for one another that's taking place here. But also his prayer is not just stimulated by his joy, but it's stimulated by a partnership that they have together. Look at verse five. Because of your partnership in the gospel from this day until now. And then look at verse seven. It's right for me to feel this way about you. Listen to the intimacy, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. What he's saying here is that they are partakers and partners in the gospel in general, that they have received the gospel the way that Paul has received the gospel, and because of that, they're united in Christ into a fellowship. In general, they're partakers in the gospel, but specifically, they're also partakers in gospel ministry. that they have come alongside Paul to labor for Christ, to partner in Christ, so to speak, with Christ for the sake of the gospel. They've done it so much that they receive Paul in the first place, but also again, they'd be willing to send one of their dear ones, Epaphroditus,

with a gift. He would get sick on the way and almost die, but he would go all the way to Rome to check on Paul and care for him, even when others would despise him and compete with him. We'll see next week. Part of what Paul's doing is sending him back and saying he's okay. He's well. Thank you for the gift They're partners with Paul and that's part of what a faithful church does is they they listen faithfully and receive the Word of God and They they listen to the officers and the ministers proclaiming the Word of God and they love one another and they love each living out the gospel in the city in which God has placed them and in the church which God has placed them, in the midst of good times and bad, in the midst of imprisonment or in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, good and bad times. It's interesting that the root word here for partnership and partaker is the same word, koinos. You've heard the word koinonia, which is the word that's used for partnership here. That when we are in Christ, we are in koinonia with one another. We're brought into a fellowship, a commonality, a unity that we are individually in union with Christ, but corporately we are also in union with Christ and we've been brought out of the orphanage into a family with God as father, Jesus as elder brother, and all kinds of other fellow members as brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul is saying we're in fellowship in the gospel. We're united in the fellowship of the gospel, both in receiving it and in proclaiming it together. And when we unite in ministry, we unite in even a deeper way. You know, some of you have been on a mission trip and you know what it's like to come back and say, I've never felt so close to a group of people before. Because you are united in the gospel and in the proclamation of the gospel and it bonds us in an intimate way. So he's speaking to, in a sense, their response to the gospel. but that's really not the main point. What's happening here in five through seven is maybe not so much in the Greek, but as one author put it in sort of a conceptual way, there's a chiasm in the sense that there's point A in verse five, point A1 in verse seven, and then verse six is point B, and it's sort of squeezed out like those two wafers in an Oreo cookie, and then you got that yummy whatever that is in between. And sometimes you take the two off and just devour it. Sometimes you squish it down and enjoy it coming out. And now they have mega stuffed Oreos. That's God's grace in our lives. What's happening is five and seven are sort of squeezing six out so it gets the attention. It's screaming for the attention. And what's happening in verse six? And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. The day of Jesus Christ. It is about the fact that they're partakers in the gospel. It is about the fact that they've responded to receiving and proclaiming the gospel, but more than anything, it's about what Christ has done and is doing and will do. Think about how this

church was started. Acts 16, you can go back and look at it in more detail, but Paul goes to this place with Silas and Timothy and Luke. And it's his custom to go into the synagogue on the Sabbath to proclaim the gospel, to water and to throw seed and see if anybody responds, and then pour into those people and start a church. The problem with Philippi is there is no synagogue. Philippi is known as Little Rome, and we'll talk more about that as the weeks go on. But its attention is to pagan worship and emperor worship, and there's no synagogue, which means there's not even 10 Jews, male Jews in the city, which is the minimum number required to start a synagogue. It's irreligious, it's lost, it's dark, it's hopeless. And so he says, okay, there's no synagogue, where else could we go? It's a shot in the dark, but they go outside the city to a river where they're hoping that what happened in the exile when there was no temple to go to because it's destroyed, so they went out of the city to the river to pray, he's hoping that will be happening here. And luck upon luck, providence upon providence, he finds not men, but some women gathered together to pray. Proclaims the gospel, and one receives the Lord, clearly Lydia and her family, and she invites them back to her home to stay, and the church begins. From a woman, who would have not even been worth a conversation in that context, but by God's grace, that's where he starts the church. And then, through a series of events, Paul is thrown into prison. Beaten and thrown into prison. And after midnight, it's amazing, he and Silas are praying and singing hymns after midnight. I cannot stay up after midnight. He's praying and singing hymns and an earthquake comes. And the jail is broken apart and their chains are released and the jailer is about to kill himself because he'll be accountable for the escape of the prisoners. And Paul says, no, we're here. Don't harm yourself. And the jailer proclaims those great words as a question, sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they respond, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your whole household. And he is. And they're baptized and they believe upon the Lord Jesus. Who could have done this but God himself? Who could do this kind of work through some women praying by a river, through a demon-possessed woman who gets Paul cast into prison, through a jailer in his household? Who could start a church that is this glorious and this wonderful but the Lord Jesus Christ in all of his glory? That's why he says, I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. He begins salvation, this verse says. He sets our affection upon us in eternity past, and he regenerates our hearts in space and time, and he calls us through the offer of the gospel, and he draws us to himself that we might believe upon him and be saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, but he's not done there. He brings us all the way home to glory. He's the author



and the finisher of our faith. He starts it and he finishes. He puts, as it were, the finishing touches on what he begins. And doesn't that give you great joy? Paul is emphatic here. I'm sure of this. I'm convinced that the one who started it will bring it to completion. It's not about what you did, it's about the fact that Paul will say in Ephesians 2.10, you are his poema, his masterpiece. He began a work, he'll bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. He saved you and he will save you. He set you apart and he will bring you home. It's what he has done for you in Christ Jesus. It's so glorious that it should be meditated upon. And that's why John Calvin says we should think about this reality with this helpful syllogism. God does not forsake the work which his own hands have begun. We are the work of his hands. Therefore, he will complete what he's begun in us. It's no wonder that Paul is so joyful and so thankful for what Christ has done in him, but also what Christ has done in this church as he reflects upon these realities. He's remembering their identities, remembering the story that they're a part of that is Christ's story from start to finish. And thirdly, we need to remember our purpose in Christ. In verses nine through 11, I think this is actually what Paul's been thinking about the whole time. He's just been trying to get there. You know, he's done that Holy Spirit pit stop as he's thought about the prayer, not just getting to what he prays, but why he prays for them. And then he actually prays this wonderful prayer in verse nine. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more. with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. Paul's focus is on this prayer and the focus of this prayer is love. He loves them, he knows God is love and loves them, and he's focusing on the fact that when they recognize that they are in Christ, that they are partners of the gospel, that he's begun the good work and he'll bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus, surely that will stimulate love within them that grows from strength to strength. It's like the love of a marriage. You don't stand at this altar and say, I do, and I love you, and then 20 years down the road say, hey, I said it, I'll tell you if anything changes. No, you continue to love. You continue to say you love. You continue to show one another that you love each other. You continue to press into the relationship to know one another more deeply, spiritually and emotionally and mentally that you may love one another and grow in love as the years go on. How much more so with the love of God towards us? That as we know the one who loves us in Christ Jesus, how can we not grow in love towards him as the years go on? as we open up our word, as we

pray, as we sit under preached words for years and decades, listening to the scriptures and hearing the word of God wash over us time and time again. And that's why he says that your love would also be coupled with knowledge. Love here is not just a wishy-washy emotive thing. It's love with a backbone. It's love with a spine. And knowledge is that spine. We love God because we know him. And we press on to know him.

Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord, Hosea says. We know him and we press on to knowing him. And as we do that, we grow in knowing him even more. And how can you know the Lord Jesus and not love him? It's impossible. It's impossible to truly know the Lord Jesus and not fall in love with him unless you love yourself more and therefore despise him. And so he says, I'm praying that your love would grow with knowledge, the knowledge of the truth of scripture, the knowledge of Christ Jesus who is the way and the truth and the life, the knowledge of God himself. And of course there's a knowledge of ourselves in the world as well that grows in that way. And that love with knowledge also produces a discernment. Discernment is the application of knowledge to life. It's not enough just to know things. We have to learn how to apply that knowledge to life. It's wisdom. And wisdom in the scriptures is akin to godliness. Becoming more like Christ and knowing how he would live and what he would do in certain scenarios. It's the application of knowledge to life. And as we grow in love and knowledge and discernment, we cannot help but begin to approve what's excellent and despise what's not. It's impossible to love Christ and look upon his excellencies and his person and work and then want to live lives that are filthy, that are not excellent, that are not noble, that are not pure, that are not Christ-like. But rather, as we know him in his excellencies, we begin to grow in wanting to be excellent ourselves. Not in the sense that, look how great I am, but excellency here is knowing not just good from bad, but the best good from second best. And that's where the rubber meets the road, isn't it? There are decisions made every single day that have to do with an okay and a way better. And as you know Christ and love him and grow in knowledge and discernment, you grow in knowing what it looks like to approve what is excellent and walk in that path. And so you become pure and blameless, he says. Purity here is spotlessness, it's congruency between who I say I am and who I really am. What I live in the pulpit and what I live in my home. And blameless, it's a moral stability, it's a moral inability to stumble in a sense. And then, we bear fruit of righteousness that comes through Christ. And this could be righteousness that comes as fruit from the grace that we drink in from Christ, or this could be the fruit that comes from being righteous in Christ. Either way, whichever way you take that, the reality is that when God changes us in Jesus

Christ, we change. It's that simple. When God changes us in Christ Jesus, we change. We meditate upon verse six where it is God's work, but Paul's gonna show us, and that does not deplete the reality of our moral responsibility as we grow in holiness, certainly through the power of the Holy Spirit, but we're learning as well as we grow in that reality to say no to unrighteousness and yes to righteousness, to begin to bear more fruit in keeping with repentance. until the day of Christ. And it is his day. The day when he will return in glory. And verse six seems to point to the reality that we will be made complete at that day, but here in verse 10, it seems to point to the reality that we're gonna be presented by God to Christ as a bride and that we are to grow in purity and blamelessness so that we're prepared for that day. It's both and. We will be made blameless and pure. We will be made spotless and holy at the day of Christ Jesus, and we're to be growing in holiness so that we're made ready for the day of Christ. But the whole process doesn't really just look to what we need to do, although that's there, obviously. It points to a primary goal, and that's at the end of verse 11. filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. He's already told us that he has done it. He's telling us that he will do it, and he gets the glory for it. He gets all the honor and all the praise and all the glory. He's gonna talk about this again when Christ is spoken of in Philippians 2, that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father. Paul's praying that God's purpose would prevail in the life of believers and in the life of the church. Even in the midst of current conflict, which they have. Disagreements, which they have. Rivalry, which they're experiencing. False teachers that have come in, which they have. Arrogance and on and on and on. Ever experienced those things in the church? You know, if you're looking for reason to become angry and bitter and presagect on the church, you'll find it here. You'll find it in any church if you're looking for those reasons. But what Paul is saying is that it's in the midst of the warts and all. It's in the midst of the mess and the chaos. It's in the midst, sadly, even of the hurt when we feel overlooked, when there's a decision made that we don't like, when the list goes on and on and on for reasons for us to be frustrated and angry and bitter. God's purpose is that he's presenting to his son a bride that is pure and spotless. It's hard to believe, isn't it? We know ourselves, we know our people. It's hard to believe that he will present to his son a spotless bride, and it's hard to believe that that's a very good gift. Psalms 2 says, ask of me and I'll give the nations as your inheritance. That doesn't sound like a great inheritance. Have you looked at the nations of late? Have you looked in the mirror of late? It doesn't sound

like a great gift except that he has set his affection upon us before the foundation of the world and he will present us to his son, pure, spotless, righteous in Christ Jesus to the praise of his glory. His purpose will prevail. And when God has a purpose like this, it also becomes our purpose within the church to grow in his grace. To say no to the deeds of the flesh and yes to righteousness. To say no to our own fleshly desires and yes to the Holy Spirit's desires. To say no to bitterness and yes to reconciliation. To say, to grow in love and knowledge and discernment, abounding more and more, and grow in purity and blamelessness. and word, thought, and deed, even to pray this over each other. As I've walked through this passage this week, I've enjoyed the Lord stimulating me to pray this for you and for me by name. What a wonderful prayer that Dr. Stewart talked about just a minute ago, bringing the scriptures to prayer, opening it up and saying, Lord, I don't know how to pray, but let me pray this prayer that Paul prayed, and let me pray specifically for this group of people, maybe Monday, and then that one Tuesday, and then that one Wednesday. This would be a great endeavor for your whole week, while it also stimulates you to remember. that the Lord is doing a work, growing you in righteousness, till you grow up into maturity, into Christ who is your head, to become more like Christ, to look like Christ, to the glory of the Father, that you now can reflect upon your new identity in Christ. That you can reflect upon the story that you've been put within in Christ. He began a work, he'll bring it to completion, and you fit in the middle of that. and that you're called to a purpose, to live godly lives and grow in holiness for his glory and praise. And if you're not a believer tonight, the reality is that's not your story. And the only reality that you can live within is that your story is self-centered and for your own glory. and that you only have two ways to live, to drive yourself into the ground, to accumulate stuff and perform and find success and hope that satisfies you, but recognize at the end of the day that it really doesn't, or to despair and give up on life altogether. But when you recognize this reality, that the Father invites you into this identity, that Christ loves you and gave himself for you, that the Father invites you into this story, that he began a good work, will bring it to completion on the day of Christ Jesus, that the Father invites you into this purpose, to live and grow in holiness that reflects him and that actually satisfies you and that ultimately brings him glory, why would you go back to those old ways? that are fleeting, will never satisfy you, and will scatter away in the end. Come to Christ. And for those of you who know him, rejoice in these realities. This is just the intro. As we move forward this summer, and reflect upon all that we have in Christ, and how that transforms us and stimulates us to a different

lifestyle, to his glory. Let's pray. Gracious God and most holy heavenly Father, we thank you for your holy word. We read it, we look at ourselves in the mirror and we recognize immediately that we don't live up, but we thank you for Christ. He who knew no sin, you made to become sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. You began a good work in us through Christ that you'll bring to completion at the day of Christ. And we ask then that you would give us a love that grows more and more with knowledge and discernment that then can approve what is excellent and be pure and blameless at the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that is in Christ Jesus and through Christ Jesus and all the praise and glory of God the Father. And would you get all that glory and honor and praise, we ask it in Christ's name, amen.