Well, thank you for setting that text before us, Abe. I appreciate your ministry to us and leading the songs as well. Hopefully you kept your Bibles open. We're going to continue through Philippians chapter 2. As you recall, we've been looking at Philippians for a number of months now, and in the last few sermons, we have been taking Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, and looking through that passage as a lens of sorts to understand what it is that the Lord requires of us as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. You'll recall that after going through that verse and understanding its meaning, we've taken some sidesteps, some rabbit trails, And I've taken two sermons so far just to highlight some of the key disciplines that need to be in our lives as individuals, in the culture of our church, such that we will be found faithful working out our salvation in the way that God intends. We've been very, very clearly directed from the letter of Philippians itself, but also the New Testament more broadly. to understand what it looks like to have certain things present in our lives so that we're faithful to be walking out the instruction in that passage.

So far, if you recall from two sermons ago, I said that we need to be keeping God's word central. As redeemed people, we need to be accustomed to the content of the word of our Redeemer, and also walking it out with obedience. We need to keep His word central. We need also to be examining what it is, who it is that we're living for. If we have been redeemed by such a God as ours, who has a perfect plan and is walking that out in history, we need to know what it is and how to participate in it with a devotion to do the things that He is calling us to do. We've also said that as we work that out, we need to be confessing and repenting of certain sins that would get in the way of doing his work. And then, of course, as we rub against one another, as we sin against one another, as we sin against the Lord, we need to be forgiving one another in the community that He's put us in as those who have been so graciously forgiven.

Those are the four things that we've seen so far across the past two sermons. These, as I've said, are practical ways in which we put hands and feet, arms and legs, on the gospel. How will people know that we've been touched by the grace of Christ? except that they see us working together alongside Him for His work. How will we come to be known as redeemed people unless we are forgiving as those who have been so graciously forgiven?

We get the point, right? We're putting arms and legs on the gospel, and Paul has been so concerned as we've looked at this letter so far that the people that he's writing to at Philippi are walking together for the gospel, making sure that they're all in rank and file doing the Lord's work. when our own experience as a church comes to match that of the church at Philippi. In other words, when pressures come from without, and conflicts and relational breaches happen within to put even more pressure on the work that God has given us to do, what will we do? How will we look? In what direction will we march? What we're looking at in some practical ways to work that out so that just as Paul was concerned for the church at Philippi to be walking in a certain direction, we also will be together for the gospel.

As he says in Philippians 1 verse 27, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel. He wants to see people growing in godliness and advancing the gospel. Now, I'm going to take this sermon to be the third of three parts, the final part in this little mini-series that takes Philippians 2 verses 12 to 13 as the interpretive lens or the jumping board, if you will.

And we're going to add two other very, very closely connected things that I want us to keep top of mind as a church so that we too, just like the church at Philippi, will be faithful to the calling that Christ has put on our lives. This is another must-have in the character of our church. And it's this, we need to remain connected to the church as individuals, as we also remain dependent on the Lord

himself. We're gonna see that those two things are very, very closely connected. If we'll remain faithful to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, we must work it out with a dependence on the Lord and the necessary commitment to the people alongside whom he has placed us.

I want to see those things dovetail together, but I want to ask you, what are your thoughts here? How do you think about the place of church in your life and the place of your life in the church? Where does that fit in your Christian experience? And as a point of connection, are you concerned about being dependent on the Lord? What would it look like for you to be dependent on the Lord?

Could people look at your life and my life, say, or hear, Or C, boy, that person really is dependent on a power outside of him or herself. So where's the place of the church and your place in the church, and where's the place of the Lord in all of that for us as we try to walk obediently to him? realizing that most of you here will likely agree with everything that I'm going to say.

I'm not expecting any tomatoes, anyone to up and leave because this is heresy. Realizing that you are in so much agreement with what the word of God says about dependence on the Lord and our place in the church, I want you to take this sermon as such an encouraging thing. Because you're here, you're recognizing your dependence on the Lord and the environment, the community, the group of people that he has placed you among, you see it as vital for your Christian life. Many of you were members of this church long before I ever came on the scene. And having talked to you, I have come to know how much you have valued the ministry of others in your lives through thick and thin they have stood with you, and have pointed past themselves to the one on whom we're ultimately dependent. You are living demonstrations of the very things that you're gonna hear tonight, and I want you to be so encouraged by it.

Allow this, allow the word of God tonight to put wind in your sails. but as you're refreshed in the truths that you already know, be looking out at the fringes of our congregation. Take heed to those that you don't see very often. Make mental note of the people that you haven't seen in a while. Look through the church directory and put your finger and thumb on the people who see once in a while, duck in, duck out, because they too need to know what you know. They too need to experience what you have experienced.

The church is vital for the believer. as we point one another to the Lord Jesus Christ. We're gonna be equipped for the work of ministry tonight as we think through the importance of the church. That last question, do you see connection with the church with the same importance the Lord does, really gets to the point that I'm trying to make, that it really is that important in our lives. Remaining committed to the church really is important as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. as we also recognize our ultimate need to be dependent on the Lord Himself.

Let me think through this with you, because there is a lot in our culture, there's a lot in our minds, there's many, many different voices that would try to argue against the things that we're going to hear tonight. There's individualistic Western culture pressing in on us. We want so much to do our own thing. in contradistinction to more Eastern cultures. They get the family connection. They get the culture that puts so much more importance on growing up in community, whatever that community is. We have this individualistic, westernized culture. We have our North American commitment to being so busy with other things.

We might even have some bad experiences at church that push against this idea that Christ calls us to a robust commitment to his body if we're to grow together. But I want us to see from Philippians and the New Testament more broadly that we are

indeed called to considerable commitment in the body of Christ as he encourages us through other people to work out our salvation.

Now, reading through Philippians from start to finish, it should be very, very clear, and you might have to think all the way back to when we did that flyover sermon many, many months ago. But it's very, very clear, even perhaps from our study in Acts, that believers become members of an organized body with certain people appointed to certain roles and responsibilities, every person committed to a common goal, in relationship with people in that same body. I think we take that for granted, but that's very much plainly taught in scripture, isn't it?

Right in the opening of the letter, chapter 1, verse number 1, Paul writes to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi with the overseers and deacons. And all the saints captures every person present, every believer that was ever redeemed at Philippi as the gospel took root in Macedonia through Paul's ministry was being addressed by the pen of Paul as he wrote from prison to them from all that distance away. All the saints, including their leaders, the overseers or pastors and the deacons that were among them, all were being exhorted through what he says here. And picture those gathered in a house, those gathered alongside Lydia, those gathered alongside the Philippian jailer who we learn about in Philippians, sorry, in Acts chapter 16. all listening to this letter and hearing together, everyone side by each, only let your manner of life addressing everyone, all your manners of life, be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you, another plural you, or am absent, I may hear of you together, standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel."

It's
not just one person reading this letter, it's the whole congregation having it read to them and listening. Oh, he's addressing us all. Every member of the church being addressed, every person present being a part of the whole. We'll develop that in a second. Another thing that we want to see from Scripture, is that we're not just called to community, but commitment in that community. We're going to see very, very clearly as we go on that working out our salvation with fear and trembling as a community, as a church, requires the investment in one another and from one another if we would grow as the Lord wants us to grow. Let me ask you a question.

Have you ever struggled in your pursuit of personal holiness? Are there certain deeply rooted sins that you're struggling to make headway against? Are there relationships that pull you one way or another and kind of make you frazzled inside? How about advancing the gospel when the political climate turns against what Christians love to stand for?

These are tough, aren't they? These take patience and endurance and perseverance. We certainly feel the weight as pressures come from within and without. We recognize at that time that this hard work is going to take perseverance. It's going to take commitment. We certainly see that in Philippians chapter 4. We're not there yet in our journey through the book, but I'll zoom ahead.

Philippians chapter 4 verses 2 to 3 says this, Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the Book of Life." These two women that Paul is addressing served, according to this text, faithfully in their labors alongside Paul.

They had demonstrated considerable commitment in making sure that he was well-served, that he was well-supplied, that he was well-encouraged. And now he's appealing to the Philippian congregation, this one true companion that he picks out from everyone else, to say, look, friends, these are struggling. They're not seeing

eye to eye. Their division is getting in the way of the gospel ministry that you've all been called to, so come alongside them as they've come alongside me. Remain committed to them as they remain committed to me, because they need to make some progress here.

I'm appealing to this as a scriptural example of helping one another through hard times in the church when gospel unity is absolutely imperative. And if you've ever been in conflict with someone or you've ever been involved in resolving that conflict between a couple people, you know how hard work that is. You know how divergent desires can become, and they're very often not in the Godward direction, such that each person needs to be reined in, each person needs to be reminded of the gospel, that takes hard work, that takes gospel-powered patience, that takes commitment to one another in the body of Christ.

Consider also the implication that comes from a passage that we've already seen, Philippians chapter two, verses three and four. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Listen to this. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Have you ever stopped to think how much work is required to actually get to know someone and what makes them tick? Have you ever stopped to think about a good friend of yours, a spouse, someone you've worked with alongside with the Lord for a long time and think, man, I really know a lot about that person. I know more about that person than perhaps I should.

But that comes from commitment, doesn't it? That comes from personal investment. That comes from helping one another along as we've learned to do nothing from selfish ambition. Friends, the commitment that we're being called to comes through this letter. so clearly.

I trust we're seeing it just from those couple of examples in Philippians, but I want us to zoom out. I want us to telescope out and look at some passages, some ideas from the rest of the New Testament, because I don't want us to leave here any way confused, but rather encouraged to be further committed to one another as we've already been committed.

Thinking beyond Philippians, we have a very important passage in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11 to 16. There we outline the responsibilities of pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, but we also see a call for every person to be involved. Read it with me, Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 to 16. The text says, and he, Christ, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and shepherds, sorry, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Pause there. We're aiming for maturity in Christ. So that, verse 14, we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes, built up into maturity, growing in sound doctrine. Rather than being held by that craftiness and deceitful schemes, rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, that's Christ, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped. When every part is working properly, Every part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. There's body language, there's building up, there's love, there's a certain manner of ministry, and every part of the body referenced in this passage is called to participate in that work, whether you're a pastor teacher or one being pastored and taught. Ample involvement from everyone. There's a call to

be committed, to be growing, and a call to help others grow.

Other passages in the New Testament, like 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 12 to 14, likewise admonish those in the pulpit, those in the pew, to be involved in this one another ministry. There we read, we ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all." As you hear that read, as you read it, do you see, do you notice the call to one anothering? Do you notice the call to commitment to others and their commitment to you? There's a call in that particular passage to be patient. with people, which really anticipates that there would be trials.

The three groups of people, the three types of people addressed in that passage, the idle or those who are walking out of step with the Lord's will, those who are fainthearted and those who need help, the weak, are three categories of people that we can either relate to ourselves or by direct connection with others. And we recognize that each one of those people groups requires understanding, but also requires patient and committed ministry from other people, don't they? The involvement to which the Lord calls us as we work out our own salvation together as a church requires us to become involved and stay involved with the commitment that Christ would give to us. We're all involved in that committed work. Now as you consider these things, I know many of you have been well-versed in these things, but still I want to ask, are you hearing the dependence that you're to have, that I'm to have, on the body of Christ that we might be grown up into maturity? I want to make it clear that we use those two passages, Ephesians chapter 4, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, as motivational passages to say, be involved.

Come alongside others who need to be admonished. Come alongside others who need wind in their sails, the fainthearted. Come alongside people who need you to put their arm around them and help them down the road, the weak who need help. Be involved, but flip that around. Do you see your need to be admonished? Do you see your need to be encouraged? Do you see your need to be helped?

Ministry doesn't happen unless we see our need to see our dependence on the body of believers that Christ has placed us among. The same ministry we're called to give is the same ministry that we humbly need to receive because we are all still disciples.

The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Do you see the body language that Paul is using in 1 Corinthians 12 that really encourages us to think, I have a place in the body of Christ and no one can tell me otherwise. You have a place in the body of Christ and no one can tell you otherwise because we're all codependent, in the biblical sense, on one another. We are the body of Christ and individually members of it. Therefore, we are all interdependent on one another for our growth.

If we're thinking about this idea through the lens of the passage that we've been looking at for a while now, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, then we better be doing it in the community that God has given to us. That's the church, and we're hearing tonight that we're to be involved in one another's lives to make that all work. Again, do you see the need of the church in your own Christian experience? Think practically with me a moment. If you do say yes to that question, if you do see the need of Christ and his body, then it will show, won't it?

Your life will be formed around the ministry of the church. You'll want to prioritize your involvement with God's people. You won't search out excuses. You won't try to forego the fellowship
with God's people because you'll see the distinct need that you have to be

supported by other members of Christ's body. You'll wrestle with things that conflict with opportunities to minister to God's grace to others and to have it ministered to you. You'll find yourself canceling plans that you would otherwise enjoy and could enjoy, perhaps even should enjoy.

But you see a greater need to be a part of the body of Christ. The ministries that are going on there. You see Christ and his people as precious and not optional, but necessary for your growth in Christ's likeness. You'll long to be back among your brothers and sisters in Christ when you have been away. And don't we know that feeling? Even if it's being away for a nice vacation, we know we'd rather be at home with God's people.

Someone with a growing love and appreciation for Christ's body will consistently prioritize the involvement with Christ's body above other things because of the desire that the Lord has placed on their heart. They'll see the body of Christ for what it is, that body of believers dependent on a ministry of every other member. Are you hearing your dependence? Are you hearing the dependence you're called to have on the body of Christ?

Now, unfortunately, not every believer knows that blessing. Not every believer knows that longing. Not every believer has yet seen the benefit that involvement with Christ's body provides. Sometimes that's because someone is young in the Lord. That comes, if I can use the term as kindly as possible, from ignorance. We just don't know. Those who are young in the Lord don't yet understand the good design that God has for the Church to bring each of his newborn children in the faith from birth to maturity, spiritually speaking, within Christ's body.

These folks, these men, these women, these youths that get saved need to be brought along by older brothers and sisters to be shown the ropes, as we might say, so that they can learn the things that we have already learned and see so much blessing in. That, by the way, is where you and I, who already know these things, come in so that we're reaching out to these folks and saying, you come with me. We've got some growing to do together. Such a person under those wings, those caring hands, comes to see in short order, many times, what a blessing it is to be connected to this body, and how much wisdom they can drink in from the Lord through these people as these older saints, these more mature saints, pour their lives into seeing these folks grow.

The newly converted husband with no idea about what it looks like to love his wife as Christ loves the church. This man who doesn't know what it looks like to live with her in an understanding way gets help from a more mature man in the church, maybe several men, who says, don't be a [***] like that. This is what the word of God says about how to love your wife. This is what it would look like to demonstrate what it looks like to live with your wife in an understanding way. Learn from my mistakes, brother. Here's God's better way. Let's walk it out together.

Likewise, the young, newly converted wife, exasperated by that young husband's selfishness, though she's not much more mature than he is, gets help from older women in the church in just the manner in which we heard from Titus chapter two as it was read this morning. They'll learn how to be reverent in behavior And from these older women who can train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled, just like he says in Titus chapter two.

Do you hear that model of discipleship? Older men coming alongside younger men, older women coming alongside younger women. And friends, get this. Listen to the different imagery that comes through the New Testament as we think of the church.

It is described, we are, as the church described variously, as living stones being built up for God's glory, as the bride of Christ, whom he nourishes and cherishes, as the body of Christ, members of one another, directed by our head, and as the household of God, each person learning to steward the roles and responsibilities that the Lord has given within that household. Now those newly married babes in Christ who need so much discipleship are learning the roles and responsibilities that the Lord has given such that they too can go on and disciple others. And generationally speaking, the gospel is put on display as every believer in community works out salvation with fear and trembling. What a wonderful model, what a wonderful image of a household and every person in it. working for the Lord with the roles and responsibility that we've heard.

Those of you who have been at Emmanuel for a while have seen that time after time after time. I've talked to Mike and Connie, Jim and Cher, Tim and Maggie, and just to name a few, who have seen the faithful ministry of those who may have been and gone with the Lord by now. But you guys are now the models to whom others can look, from whom others can learn, the wisdom that profited you guys so much, how much blessing comes from recognizing all of that wisdom trickling down, raining down from generation to generation as the body is built up in love through interpersonal ministry. You guys have seen what it looks like to be discipled in just the way that God has designed.

Now for how encouraging that is, for how encouraging it is to think of that growth that comes As we work together like that, we don't want to take for granted that everyone assumes that to be the best thing. Maybe we have people in our minds who have broken our hearts. who have started off strong, they have seemed to grow for a time, they've been sitting under this discipleship, they've been walking with you, but then the cares of this world come in, the busyness of work, the inordinate connections or commitment to friends and family comes in, sports, other hobbies come in, and the cares of this world choke out that commitment to the body of Christ that we're here talking about tonight. Eventually, you hear from that person when you ask them, hey, you're coming to church, right? Well, I'll make it if I'm able. And you hear that prioritization slip in favor of other things. Eventually, unfortunately, they might even tell you, well, there wasn't much in it for me anyway.

And that person drifts, drifts, drifts. Tragically, many start that drift And it comes to a disastrous end as that person isolates themselves. When we start to drift from the fold God's flock under the care of shepherds that God has given to lead us in sound doctrine and beat away the wolves, so to speak. That drift from the fold leads to ending up being devoured. And that makes complete sense. That analogy carries. Peter would even tell his folks, our adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

Folks, if we don't remain committed to Christ's body, if we don't remain under those who labor over us in the Lord, the shepherds that God has given to us, if we don't remain on guard against false doctrine and the wares of this world to come in and steal away our hearts, we end up demonstrating a lack of commitment to the church, which is absolutely spiritually disastrous. So hearing, as we are tonight, the call to commitment, we ought to be watching out for one another, constantly encouraging one another. Make sure you're in church. Hey, where have you been? I haven't seen you in a while. Come back to the flock. We miss you. There's growing to do. Let's grow together.

Brothers and sisters, the word of God would direct our hearts to the one another ministry intended by the Lord to grow us by his grace. We need connection to the church desperately if we would work out our salvation with fear and trembling as we're so familiar with now from this text in Philippians chapter two. And let me just pepper you with some verses to hammer that down so that it's clear in our

minds. Regular fellowship with God's people To be stirred by them, just like it says in Hebrews 10, verses 24 to 25.

And to bear one another's burdens, Galatians 6, verse 2. Providing accountability to bring sin into the light, Ephesians 5, 11. Confessing sins to one another, James 5, 16. Weeping and rejoicing with one another according to the need of the moment, Romans 12, 15. Admonishing, encouraging, and helping one another, 1 Thessalonians 5, 14, as we just heard. Speaking the truth in love to one another, just like we heard tonight from Ephesians 4, 15.

Restoring those ensnared by sin with hearts that are guarded by the gospel, Galatians 6, 1. All these and more. are so necessary as part of our church, as part of our own individual commitment to one another, if we will put on display the glories of Christ's gospel, because they make up that one another ministry, that interdependent ministry to one another that we're all being called to.

Just think as you sit here pondering these things tonight. Aren't you thankful for the work of the church in your own spiritual walk? Aren't you thankful for the work of the body of Christ to bring you to where you are now in your spiritual maturity? How the Lord has used Emmanuel Baptist Church and the believers therein to bring you from birth to maturity. Isn't that a blessing to think about?

They've come alongside. God always seems to place people at just the right time, doesn't he? It's always perfect. We're struggling, we're in need of encouragement, and there comes a brother or sister with a word. He or she puts wind in our sails. He or she points beyond the gnarly mountaintops of that valley of deep darkness that we're going through. And if, for just a second, points to the light on the horizon, there's Christ. Focus on Christ. He's the shepherd that's leading you through this dark valley. and he's gonna get you out of it, follow him.

Isn't it amazing that God's people are so often brought into our lives so that Christ ministers to us through them in that way? Haven't you known the blessing of being corrected at times? Maybe that's only me, you're all nearly perfect, I jest. But isn't it a blessing to have people come alongside of us to say, brother, you shouldn't be doing that.

Sister, let's do this instead, it will glorify God. because you see where the Lord is at work to still refine you. You know that the Lord is still at work in your life because you hear his voice through these people, and on we go in growing together. How kind of the Lord to place his people where he knows they're needed, that his body might grow and his gospel be advanced. And I'll take you back to Philippians. That's what Paul is concerned about for the saints at Philippi. So are you convinced tonight of the importance of the local church in your life?

Let this be wind in your sails if you're already doing it. Press on. Thank you for your faithful example. Thank you for being instruments in the Redeemer's hands, if I can steal that book title from Paul Tripp. Consciously aware that your ministry is valuable in the hands of the Lord as he takes a body of believers like this, as needy as we are, and brings them from one step in the maturity process to the next. And let me remind you again, as you are encouraged, be watching at the fringes, because there are brothers and sisters who need that encouragement to come back into the fold, to be involved, and to see the blessing of serving others that you already know. Let me change gears for a second.

You and I heard early on as I asserted this, a commitment to the church really is important as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. God has given this wonderful community that we call the church, our local congregation, Emmanuel Baptist Church, seeking to serve the Lord faithfully as the institution, the church

at large, as the institution that he has chosen in this time to make his glory known through the gospel message. We are being exhorted tonight, we are being encouraged tonight to consider the importance of that body in our lives. But I want you to recognize with me something so crucial as we think about how important the church is.

Crucially, this all only works, this growth together only works because of what we've seen in Philippians 2 verse 13. It is God who works in us. It is God who works in us, let me say it again, it is God who works in us to will and to work for his good pleasure. If anything is going to bear fruit for his glory, then it's gonna be because of his work in us. And here's where I want us to see our second point, that while we do need the church, while it is such a crucial part of our lives, we also need to recognize that we are ultimately dependent not on one another, but on him, the source of that grace that transforms us so much.

Philippians 2.13, as we've already seen, makes very clear that any good that we do as believers, any personal growth, any corporate accomplishment for his glory, as the gospel comes forth from our lips, only comes because it's God working in us. And when God works, he's the only one that gets the glory. It is God who works in you and I, both to will and to work, for his good pleasure. Let me ask it to you like this.

Whose grace is necessary for us to work out everything that we've been exhorted to so far in these individual characteristics that should make us up? Whose grace is necessary for us to work out our salvation through Bible-guided, heart-examining, sin-confessing, repentance-pursuing, forgiveness-granting, church-involved, gospel-advancing transformation? All of those things packaged up, as we've seen, are so necessary. Whose grace is necessary for it? God Almighty. The Lord Jesus Christ, he's the one whose grace makes that possible.

We're dependent therefore on him. Back in chapter one, verse 11 of our letter to the Philippians, we already saw that it's on that day when we look back at Christ's work in us that we'll realize that we will have been filled with the fruit of righteousness as a result of his work. will be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ of the glory and praise of God. So we know, even from the letter that we've been studying, that any good from us, in us, and through us, comes from Christ's work. We're dependent on him. It's our relationship with him, his spirit working so powerfully in us to war against the flesh, that ultimately makes us stand in times of temptation. It's his work that carries us through, isn't it? And we should say, to circle back to what we've been saying, it's his people that so often encourage us. Any which way you slice this, it comes back to giving Jesus the glory because it's his people accomplishing his work by his spirit according to the truth of his word. Wonderful.

At the end of the letter, book ends here, Philippians 4.13 says, I can do all things through Christ. Who strengthens me? Whose strength is it? It's Christ. That really shouldn't surprise us. When we survey the New Testament just briefly, we see Paul in 2 Timothy 4, verses 16 and 17, recollecting this.

At my first defense, when I stood before these Roman governors, at my first defense, no one came to stand by me. There was no one around to strengthen him, no one around to support him. But he says, all deserted me, may it not be charged against them, but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me. He was strengthened by the Lord.

Do you know that power? Do you know what it is for Jesus to come and personally strengthen you in the trials that you are facing? I know you do. I've talked to some of you who are well aware that Jesus causes me to stand. When I reach out to Jesus, he helps me. He shows up, his word guides me, his spirit comforts me, his

people come alongside and are such a blessing to me. You know the strength that Jesus provides.

Surely it's the Lord, isn't it? It's the Lord who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think. It's beyond our comprehension according to the power at work within us. It's by His grace we'll overcome temptation. It's by His grace and power that we persevere through hard things. It's by His grace that we'll put His salvation on display to the watching world. And then Paul says, I am sure of this. that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion, will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It's ultimately all his work, and we're so thankful for it.

That's true for every believer here tonight. Everywhere in the world where there is a Christian joined to the local church, we're encouraged by Jesus' words. Whoever abides in me, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing. We need to be connected to Christ. We need to be connected to his people as they point us to Christ. It's him who is at work so powerfully in us. willing and working for his good pleasure so that we can work out our salvation as we've been exhorted to do so frequently through this text.

Friends, for all the important things we've said about the church tonight, and we've said a lot, I've given you a lot to think about in terms of all of the passages that point us in the direction of interdependent mutual ministry of the word together, there's still one thing that takes priority. And that's to recognize that the Church and every member that makes it up is absolutely powerless to do anything that we've been called to do outside of the empowering grace of our head, our Lord Jesus Christ. As Psalm 127 verse 1 says, unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. I don't think there's a clearer passage that we can think of to double down on the fact that if God's not in this, Nothing's going to work according to what he's designed. It has to be God working in us, through us, for us, for us to bring glory to him. And it is the Lord who builds it so that those who labor don't labor in vain.

How encouraging it is to know his power at work in us as a congregation. How wonderful it is to know that love that leads us. How wonderful it is that his wisdom guides us through every trial. His comfort keeps us from despairing. Let me ask you, doesn't that make you, as a fellow believer, want to tell that grace, that provision, that power, that wisdom to others? To see how the Lord takes how encouraging he is and fills our sails to say, now go tell others. Find someone else who's struggling. Find someone else who needs the wisdom of God's word and tell it to them.

Because that is how God leads his people. That's how the Lord Jesus Christ leads his people, is through the ministry of one another. We're pointing one another to His sufficiency, His power. So in addition to praying for Him to work so powerfully, and pray we must, we cannot say that we're dependent on the Lord if we're not praying to Him. It's through prayer that we lay hold of His promises, lay hold of His power, lay hold of His strength. So we must be praying. But in addition to be praying to Him to accomplish all of these things, We'll be pointing others to his power.

Maybe we've seen him work in his providence and we're so encouraged and someone comes up to us saying, oh, I don't know how this is going to work out. Well, let me tell you what I've just seen the Lord do. And you're pointing one another to how strong he is, how powerful he is to accomplish his purposes. If you're not pointing to His power and His providence, maybe you'll point another to His love.

Oh, how great a sacrifice He has made for us. How much more will He meet us in the need by giving us the lesser things? He's given us Himself. Let's press on and

pursue those things that He's also promised to give us.
His steadfast love endures forever. We'll encourage one another to pursue His wisdom when we're tried, when we're wondering what way to go. We're not going to look to the world and the self-help. That, by definition, is a failure, isn't it? What do I have in me that can help me along to please the Lord? No, it's outside of us.

It's Christ's Spirit working in us that we need to point one another to. And that comes through the proper ministry of His Word. In Him, in Christ, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. So we don't look to psychology, we don't look to self-help, we look to Christ and His Word to be guided in the trials that we face. His Word revives the soul. And we certainly want to be praying for one another to experience the comfort that he gives.

How many times have you been suffering? How many times have you needed to be comforted? And someone who has been comforted by the Lord, perhaps in another area of struggle, has come alongside and shared the comfort with which they have been comforted, and you've had wind put in your sails. You've been made to persevere because that person has passed along the comfort of Christ to you. As we share abundantly in Christ's suffering, says Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

So whether you and I are struggling with a personal sin, whether you and I are looking to get involved in a church as we should, we will need to be keeping this commitment to Christ's body in mind. More than that, empowering all of that, we want to be wholly dependent on the Lord And if we can just tie a big bow around everything that we've said these past three sermons, as we keep God's word central, examine what or who we're most devoted to, as we confess and repent of certain sins, and forgive us those who have been forgiven so much, Because of what we've heard tonight, we'll also keep connected with a certain degree of commitment to the church and continue to point one another to the Lord Jesus Christ, who makes all of it work in the first place.

This is his plan. It's his provision of grace to make it work so that we can work out our salvation with fear and trembling, knowing all along, as we've tried to underscore tonight, that it's him who works in us to will and to work for his good pleasure. With him, as Psalm 60, verse 12 says, we shall do valiantly Let's just be sure to remain dependent on Him in all things. Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we're so thankful for this reminder tonight about the centrality of the church and what place it should take in our lives. God, we're thankful that we can have such a body to lean on, to be a part of. to be involved in, to be ministered to by. We're thankful that so many faithful people have gone before us. Not perfect, Lord, because you're the only perfect one. And you've chosen to use imperfect people to minister your grace to us, that we might be found faithful to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, knowing all along, Lord, that it's you who works in us to will and to work for your good pleasure. Please continue this work in us, Lord.

We want to be found faithful to do this. We definitely want to be involved in the church. We want the church to be involved in our lives, that we might remain accountable and ever growing into the fullness, the stature of the head, Jesus Christ, because we know that when that happens, you'll receive glory for it. Keep us faithful to your word. Help us to walk these things out faithfully. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.