

According to Merriam-Webster, the oldest dictionary in the US, the top word of 2023 was “Authentic”.

They claimed that there was a substantial increase in online searches for this word, and it maybe isn’t surprising. After all, this year we’ve heard about:

- An explosion of impersonation and false information on what used to be called Twitter, after Elon Musk changed their policies about verified accounts.
- Also an upsurge text, images and videos created by Artificial Intelligence which has blurred the lines between what is real and what is fake.
- And many of us have had scam calls and texts from people pretending to be from Amazon, An Post, Microsoft. In fact a man from Australia recently was charged with sending over 17 million scam texts.

So it’s not surprising that many this year have been searching for something authentic. Something that is real. For people who are being true to their own identity, personality or character.

But authenticity has always been important to God. The Bible has always taught us to be people of honesty, truthfulness and sincerity. And some of Jesus’ strongest words of judgement were directed towards the Pharisees because of their hypocrisy - because they were pretending to be something that they were not.

So in this year ahead, God doesn’t want us to put on act or try and become somebody. Instead he wants us just to be real, to be authentic, to live out who we really are.

So who are we? What is our true identity and what would it look like to live this out this year?

Well, over the next few months we’re going to spend some time looking at Paul’s letter to the Philippians. It is an incredible four chapters, filled with so much truth for us to learn.

But today we’re just going to look at the first two verses of this, because they remind us who we really are if we’ve put our trust in Jesus. Philippians 1:1-2 “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

1. Sinners in Need of Christ

Paul began this letter by following the convention of his day. He said who this letter was from, who it was to and he gave a word of greeting. But as often was the case, his greeting was slightly different from others.

- The standard Greek way of saying hello was “greetings”.
- Jewish people greeted one another with peace. So their letters often began with, “Greetings and peace.”

But Paul adapted this regular greeting into a Christian prayer. He said, “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:2 That’s because he knew that he was writing to sinners who were in need of the grace and peace of Christ.

a) Saved By Grace

This is the foundation of the Christian life. Learning to drive a car is not easy. Many people need a few attempts before they pass their driving test. But few people need as many attempts as Cha Sa-Soon from South Korea.

Incredibly it took 860 attempts for her to pass her written theory test, and another 100 attempts to pass her practical exam.

Now I’m sure none of us have failed as many driving tests as that, but we all know what it’s like to fail. That’s because “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

Like that Cha Sa-Soon, we’ve all messed up again and again. We’ve all rebelled against his rule and reign in our lives and fallen short of his perfect pass mark.

But unlike Cha Sa-Soon, no matter how many times we try, we will never pass the test. Whatever we do, we can never pay the debt that we owe to God. We can never make ourselves right with him.

And so we need someone else to pass the test for us. We need a gift of righteousness that we could never deserve, merit or earn.

And that gift is God’s grace. In his great love, Jesus passed the test for us. He lived a perfect life. He never sinned in what

he said, or did or thought.

And so when he died on the cross, he took upon himself our sin, so that if we put our trust in him, we can receive his perfect score. We are declared righteous in God's sight forever. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no-one can boast." Ephesians 2:8–9

And the result of this is that we have peace with God. Before this we were enemies of God, separated from him and heading to a lost eternity. But if we've put our trust in Jesus, then "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1

We've been reconciled to him. Accepted into his family. Made complete in him.

This is the heart of the Christian gospel, the core of Paul's message. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst." 1 Timothy 1:15

This is what he told the people of Philippi when he went there in his second missionary journey. People like the jailer who callously put Paul and Silas' in an inner cell with their feet in the stocks, while their backs bled from an unjust flogging.

But this is also what he told Lydia, a respectable business woman. She was a worshipper of God, and yet still was a sinner in need of grace.

And this is what each of us have to accept if we are going to be saved. We need to accept that we are sinners, and receive God's grace and peace through faith in Jesus.

b) Sustained By Grace

But if we have been saved, then we still need that grace and peace. We don't start our Christian lives as sinners in need of God's grace and peace, and then continue by depending on our own resources and efforts, or by trying to cover-up our flaws by rules, regulations and rituals.

It is by grace we are saved. And it is by grace that we are sustained to continue to live for Jesus. Paul said about himself, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." 1 Corinthians 15:10

And so in this letter, Paul was writing to people who were still sinners. People who continued to need to come to Christ for the grace and peace that they need each day.

And we are the same. "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:8–9

If we are going to live out who we really are this year, then we need to humble ourselves before God and

- accept that we are sinners,
- be honest about our ongoing temptations,
- admit our weaknesses,
- own up about our struggles and failures.

Not to put ourselves down, beat ourselves up, or condemn ourselves and walk away from God. But so that we continue to come to Christ for the grace and peace that we need.

So that we can let him continue to

- Forgive our sin
- Purify our hearts
- Transform our lives
- Make us more like Jesus!

As we'll see next time, the great news is that God is committed to this process, but we need to be willing to participate in it. We need to accept that we are sinners in need of Christ.

2. Saints who Belong to Christ

But we also need to accept that we are saints who belong to Christ! Paul addressed this letter "To all the saints in Christ

Jesus at Philippi." Philippians 1:1

In our culture, saints are people who lived especially virtuous, heroic, and selfless lives or suffered martyrdom for their faith. In some traditions they're even people to pray to for specific things - if you lose something, need money, need healing or protection.

But that's not what the Bible says. The New Testament uses the word saint to describe every believer in Jesus, just like we use the term Christians.

a) God is Holy

The word saint means holy or set apart. Isaiah heard the seraphs in heaven calling: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty." Isaiah 6:3 Our God is a holy God – he is perfect in purity and power, and separate from the corruption of this world.

And Paul called the Christians in Philippi saints, because they too were separate from this world. They were set apart to live for God.

Of course unlike with God, this was not something intrinsic to them, nor was it something that they'd deserved, earned, or achieved by themselves. As we've seen, in of themselves they were sinners.

b) We've Been Made Holy

Instead they were "saints in Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:1. It was Jesus who'd made them holy through his sacrifice on the cross, when they put their faith in him.

This was true for Lydia, the first person to trust in Christ under Paul's preaching in Philippi. She became a saint when "The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message." Acts 16:14.

But this was also true of the jailer in Philippi. It required an earthquake to get his attention, but he also became a saint when he accepted Paul's message: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Acts 16:31

People from very different backgrounds and experiences. Yet both of them were saints.

And whatever our background or experience, if we've repented of our sin and put our trust in Jesus alone and his sacrifice on the cross, then, "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Hebrews 10:10

We've been set apart from this world, and brought into relationship with God.

c) We're God's Holy People

And that should change how we live this year in so many ways. We'll see this as we go through this letter, but it includes:

- Confidence, as we are sure that we belong to God and that he is going to continue his work of transformation in our lives: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6
- Certainty, as we are citizens of heaven and will go to be with the Lord when we die, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." Philippians 1:23
- Community, as we are part of the family of saints and live with the "Same love, being one in spirit and purpose." Philippians 2:2
- Celebration, as we rejoice in all that Jesus has done for us: "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice." Philippians 4:4
- Contentment, being "content whatever the circumstances." Philippians 4:11, because if we have Jesus we have all that we need.

And so we don't need to live this year overwhelmed with guilt, shame, fear and worry. Even in the reality of all our weaknesses, limitations and failures, we can live this year with confidence, certainty, celebration, community and contentment!

If we've trusted in Jesus, then we are God's holy people. We're loved by him, righteous in his sight, accepted in his family, held by his hand, empowered by his presence and heading for heaven.

This year, we are called to live out the reality that we are saints who belong to Christ.

Video: A New Year

3. Servants who Live for Christ

This was also true of Paul. He too was a saint because he was saved by God's grace on the road to Damascus. But Paul described himself differently here.

He could've called himself a child of God, a citizen of heaven, a joint-heir with Christ, an apostle, a church-planter, a disciple-maker, a Scripture-writer. But instead he described himself and Timothy as ["Servants of Christ Jesus."](#) Philippians 1:1

The word literally means a slave. This was in an era where slavery was common. So Paul would've been all too familiar with the inhumane, degrading and barbaric aspects of slavery.

But that's not what he was thinking of here. Instead he saw himself as a slave because he understood that we was completely owned by Christ. And because of that, he understood that his role was to do what Christ commanded him, whatever that meant.

Of course this was not forced on him. This was his choice. He loved Christ and so was wholehearted in his dedication to him and passionate in his service for him. He served Christ from his heart. He wrote: ["For to me, to live is Christ..."](#) Philippians 1:21

a) A Christ-like Life

This is how Paul wanted the Christians in Philippi to live. Yes some of them had specific roles in the church. Paul specifically addresses here the ["Overseers and deacons."](#) Philippians 1:1

- The overseers are the pastors or elders that God appointed to teach God's Word and care for God's people.
- The deacons, or servants, are those appointed to serve in specific ministries in the church community.
- But as we will see, Paul wanted all of the believers in Philippi to have a servant-heart, one like Christ expressed when he went to the cross. ["Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."](#) Philippians 2:5

And he showed them what that would look like, in terms of serving in prayer, love, evangelism, fellowship, suffering, unity, caring for others and generosity.

b) A Christ-Honouring Life

And this is how we're called to live too. If we've put our faith in Jesus, then we're servants of Christ. ["You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body."](#) 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

So we should have a servant heart. Not focussed on ourselves, our plans, our agendas or our blessings. But focussed on serving Christ, the one who bought us with his own blood.

This is how we live out who we are. This is how we honour Christ.

c) A Christ-Filled Life

But this is also how we step into more and more of the blessings that we have in Christ. This is crucial in understanding how we can experience what Paul wrote in this letter.

As we'll see, Paul wrote about some amazing things that we'd love to have in our lives this year. Things like abounding love, unwavering courage, future reward, amazing peace, sufficient strength, generous provision. And especially joy. This is a letter filled with joy.

But if we read these verses out of context, we might think that our lives should just automatically be full of these things in the year ahead. That we can just sit back and wait for this to come to us in a self-centred way.

But if we do that, then I think we'd be setting ourselves up for frustration and disappointment. These benefits are not enjoyed by those who live for themselves. They're not experienced by those who hold onto their independence, rights and plans.

Instead what Paul described and modelled here is the experience of those who live as servants of Christ - who accept Christ's ownership of their lives, who submit to his will, who are wholehearted and passionate in their service for him.

As Jesus said, ["For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."](#) Mark 8:35 It is in laying down our lives in service that we ultimately receive all that God wants for us.

Conclusion

This year, God wants us to live an authentic life. Not trying to hide who we are. Not trying become something that we're not. Instead, just living our who we really are.

- Sinners who are in need of the grace and peace that can only come from Christ.
- Saints who know that they belong to God because they've been made holy by Christ.
- Servants, who're wholehearted and committed to living for Christ.

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