

I don't know if you realised, but Friday past was an important day on our calendar? It is called Quitter's Day.

Many people take the opportunity of the New Year to make commitments to change something in their lives. In Ireland, the most popular resolutions are often about things like

- Losing weight
- Getting fit
- Spend less money
- Spend more time with family and friends

Of course, those are good things to aim for. And some people do see those resolutions change their lives. But unfortunately, many people don't.

Maybe as high as 92% of people give up their resolutions before the end of the year. And Strava claimed that the day on which people using their running app were most likely to give up was the 2nd Friday of January, which they called Quitter's Day.

So if you're still going strong with your New Year's Resolutions, then well done. You're doing better than many. Keep going.

But this does illustrate how much easier it is to start something than to continue it. We can have all the good intentions in the world, but living it out is tough!

That's true in our Christian lives as well. A couple of weeks ago, we saw from the start of Paul's letter to the Philippians, that if we've trusted in Jesus, we are

- Sinners, saved by grace.
- Saints, who belong to God.
- Servants, who're called to live wholeheartedly for Christ.

But living that out is difficult. We need help to live out who we are, not just for few months, but for our whole lives!

And so Paul wrote to the Christians in Philippi to provide this help. And he did this first of all by sharing with them how he was serving them through prayer.

- Not only was this a good example for them to follow.
- It was also an encouragement that God was at work in their lives.
- And the reassurance that although they might feel like giving up, they could rest on the fact that God never would. With him, there would be no Quitter's Day!

Philippians 1:3-11: "I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God."

1. Pray with Faithfulness

If anyone could be excused for giving up, then surely Paul could. Since trusting in Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul had tirelessly served the Lord for nearly 30 years. Early on, he shared the gospel in Damascus, Jerusalem and Antioch.

Then over a period of 10 years or so, in an age when travel was difficult and dangerous, he covered thousands of miles to tell people about Jesus.

Despite persecution, imprisonment, beatings, flogging and even stoning, Paul and his team saw people come to faith in Christ and established in their discipleship and many churches planted.

But then Paul was arrested in Jerusalem. After two years, he was transferred to Rome, via a shipwreck on the coast of Malta. But even that didn't stop him serving. He still shared the gospel with those he could and he wrote letters of

encouragement to churches and individuals. Many scholars think that his letter to the Philippians is one of those letters, written from Rome around 61-63 AD.

But Paul served in another vital way during all that time. He faithfully prayed for people. [“In all my prayers for all of you.”](#) Philippians 1:4. This was a characteristic of Paul’s ministry. There was a balance between his active service and his waiting on God.

We’re all different in terms of our personalities, experiences, abilities and gifting. And so we have different ways that we’re called to serve Christ. We can give generously, listen carefully, help practically, advise biblically, encourage compassionately and of course point people to Jesus passionately.

But sometimes we can feel hampered in what we can. Maybe through ill-health, restricted mobility, lack of time. Like Paul in prison, we’re not able to do all that we used to, or would like to do. But we can all serve as he did. We can pray.

a) For Others

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, [“Be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”](#) Ephesians 6:18 Both individually and corporately, we’re called to people who faithfully pray for each other, our families, our neighbours, our country, our world.

And this is not a second class service. It’s not something to do just when we’re not good enough or healthy enough or free enough to serve in other more important ways.

The church at Philippi was planted at a prayer meeting. [“On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer.”](#) Acts 16:13

Later Paul was imprisoned in Philippi because of an incident that occurred [“when we were going to the place of prayer.”](#) Acts 16:16

And the prison in Philippi was rocked on its foundations when [“about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.”](#) Acts 16:25

This is our primary service, because through it we connect with the power of God! After all Jesus said, [“Apart from me, you can do nothing.”](#) John 15:5

b) Following Jesus

And serving in prayer is following in the footsteps of Jesus, as he, [“Is also interceding for us.”](#) Hebrews 7:25

Are we willing to serve by praying faithfully?

2. Pray with Gratitude

Paul also prayed with gratitude. [“I thank my God every time I remember you.”](#) Philippians 1:3 When Paul prayed for this church, he was incredibly grateful for them.

a) Partnership

And he told them why. [“I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel.”](#) Philippians 1:4-5

Some people have the idea that Paul loved serving Christ on his own. That he didn’t need anyone and could do it all by himself. But that’s not true. He loved working as part of a team, with Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke – and with this church.

There were people in Philippi [“Who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel.”](#) Philippians 4:3

Others in this church had financially supported him. [“You sent me aid again and again when I was in need.”](#) Philippians 4:16

They’d even sent Epaphroditus, [“Whom you sent to take care of my needs.”](#) Philippians 2:25

But it was also because this church had prayed for him. [“Through your prayers.”](#) Philippians 1:19

Paul was rejoicing that through all these ways, this church had partnered in the sharing the gospel.

b) Perseverance

And this meant so much because they had persevered in this. He'd been hurt by so many people who'd let him down. People who'd criticised him and abandoned him.

But this church in Philippi had faithfully served with Paul ["from the first day until now."](#) Philippians 1:5 They'd persevered in their partnership with him.

For us too, gratitude is a crucial part of our prayer life. Later in this letter Paul encourage the Philippians that even when they are anxious, to pray ["with thanksgiving."](#) Philippians 4:6.

That's because gratitude changes our perspective on things. It reminds us of God's goodness, fills us with joy and deepens our faith.

So who are we grateful for today? Let's thank God for those people he has placed into our lives. For those who have worked with us in partnership, who have persevered with us, in good times and bad.

3. Pray with Confidence

But Paul didn't just pray with gratitude for what God had done through these believers. He also prayed with confidence in what God was going to do. ["Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ."](#) Philippians 1:6

a) God will Complete his Work

When Paul left Philippi this church, it was filled with really new believers. He'd visited them once since then, but on the whole, he'd not been there to support them and help them grow. And he expected to be martyred any day now!

And he knew that this church faced huge challenges as a group of believers. Some of these were from outside of their fellowship. Paul had been flogged and thrown into prison for his faith in Philippi. And he said to them, ["You are going through the same struggle you saw I had."](#) Philippians 1:29

But they also faced challenges from within their fellowship. They had problems with infighting and disagreements. In many ways this church looked anything but strong. They were young, under threat and divided.

So how could Paul be so confident that the transformation in these Christians would continue and that it would be completed when Christ would come back?

Well that's because Paul's confidence was in God. He was confident that it was God who had begun the work of transformation in their lives. And it would be God who would continue this. And it would be God who would complete it.

This is our security as believers in Jesus. Jesus doesn't partially save anyone. If we've put our faith in him, and his sacrificial death on the cross, then he will save us completely. Jesus said, ["I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand."](#) John 10:28

b) God is Working in our lives

Often, we feel weak and vulnerable as believers. And in some ways it's good to realise our frailty as arrogance and self-confidence is a dangerous thing: ["If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"](#) 1 Corinthians 10:12 We need to face up to our weakness, run from temptation, accept help, depend on Christ.

But God doesn't want us to live in fear and insecurity. That would paralyse us in our service for Christ. If Paul had been looking at this church from a human point of view, he'd never have left them to share the gospel elsewhere. He'd have been too scared they'd fall apart.

So, yes, we need to pray for help. But we can do this with confidence. Not in ourselves, our strength or commitment. But in ["...him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy."](#) Jude 24

It is this confidence that will free us to serve the Lord with commitment, passion and sacrifice! And it is this confidence that will encourage us to pray more consistently for others. Salvation is God's work from start to finish – and so we need to depend more on God to save and keep those we love.

And it is this confidence that will help us to know that ["in all things God works for the good of those who love him."](#)

Romans 8:28 Whatever is happening in our lives today, if we are in Christ, then God has promised that he is carrying on his good work in us.

4. Pray with Love

But Paul didn't just pray for this church out of faithfulness, gratitude or confidence. He also prayed for them because he loved them. ["It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart."](#) Philippians 1:7

a) Connected by Christ's Love

Paul really loved this church. And this wasn't just a human emotion. It wasn't just friendship. It was ["the affection of Christ Jesus."](#) Philippians 1:8 It was the love of Christ that supernaturally united him with this church.

This is the unique connection we have with all our fellow-believers in Christ. 5 of us were at the Irish Preachers Conference this week. There were loads of people there we'd never met before. And yet, as we chatted, worshipped, learned and prayed together, there was a deep connection. We were brothers and sisters in Christ!

b) Motivated by Christ's Love

And it is this connection that should motivate us to serve with each other in prayer. This church was in Paul's prayers because they were first of all in his heart.

Human emotion or friendship is not strong enough to hold us together. Sooner or later someone will offend us, we'll not feel close to someone, or we'll just get tired.

Only God's love will motivate us to keep on praying, keep on partnering, keep on serving. ["For Christ's love compels us."](#) 2 Corinthians 5:14

c) Growing in Christ's Love

And so it's not surprising that a key aspect of Paul's prayer for this church was ["that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight."](#) Philippians 1:9

Growing in love is at the heart of what it means to grow as a Christian. Without real love what we say, do and accomplish is empty, worthless and harmful.

But this love is not some undefined, warm, fuzzy feeling. It is a love that is based on knowledge. A love that is centred on a great insight into who Jesus is, what he has done and what he calls us to do. It is to increasingly: ["Love each other as I have loved you."](#) John 15:12

5. Pray with Purpose

And Paul had a clear purpose in why he prayed for this in their lives. ["So that you may be able to discern what is best."](#) Philippians 1:10 He didn't want them just to be OK, just to survive. He wanted them to live the best life.

a) To Live the Best Life

This is the life that Jesus went to the cross to give us: ["I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."](#) John 10:10

But what does this best life look like? Well it is more about our character than our circumstances. It is in living, ["Pure and blameless until the day of Christ."](#) Philippians 1:10 It is about consistently living clean and unblemished lives.

But this is not a life of self-righteousness. Instead it is a life, ["Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ."](#) Philippians 1:11.

The best life is in remaining in Christ, experiencing his life, his Spirit in us, and through his power, becoming more and more like him in every aspect of our lives.

We often imagine the best life is a life of relaxing, doing what we want, being focussed on ourselves. But this so far from the truth. It is those who lose their life for Christ will actually save it. It is those who live as servants of Christ who live life to the full – and who will experience the love, fulfilment, contentment and joy that Paul wrote about in this letter.

b) To bring God Glory

But Paul's ultimate purpose was that their lives would be, ["To the glory and praise of God."](#) Philippians 1:11.

This is the heart of Paul's servant attitude.

- His focus was not their happiness, even though he knew that increasing commitment to Christ would bless them more and more.
- Neither was his focus the success of his work – even though he wanted to be able to rejoice in this fruit of his ministry.
- His ultimate goal was that God would be glorified and praised.

Conclusion

So this is why Paul did not quit, like we often do with our New Year's Resolution. He was still as focussed on serving the Lord with the same passion, eagerness and determination as ever because his desire was to please the Lord, the one who loved him so much that he gave himself to the cross for him.

So let's ask God to give us that same commitment in our lives. To serve the one who came to serve us. And whatever else we do, to do that through praying with faithfulness, gratitude, confidence, love and purpose to the glory and praise of our God.

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