

Psalm 62:1-2, 5-8, 11-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken. For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.

Philippians 3:17-4:1, 8-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

I want us to start by remembering & trying to recall how it felt,
a particular time when you felt especially safe, warm & secure,

and what was it like?

The ancient world was a very dangerous, uncertain and violent place,
and in Psalm 62, David is writing about his safe security in the Lord
regardless of whatever dangers are going on all around him, vs. 1-2,

For God **alone** my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.

He **alone** is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall never be shaken.

That image of safe and secure, a place of protection and refuge
became an important metaphor used throughout the Old Testament
to describe the steadfast faithfulness and goodness of God.

Psalm 62 explains and describes the experience of God,
as a place of blessed presence, of security and protection
from the violence of that uncertain and dangerous world,
recognizing that **only God** is always faithful, powerful and good,
& that **only God** can provide true refuge and sure deliverance, vs. 5-8,

For God **alone** my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He **alone** is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; **God is a refuge for us.**

That image of an unchanging safe and secure place of sure refuge,
reminds me of a very special place I enjoyed as a young child.

Along the shoreline of Cape Ann near Gloucester, Massachusetts,
same place where my great, great grandfather also played as a boy,
where there are huge truck-size-boulders overlooking the ocean
that have withstood centuries of powerful storms & hurricanes.

When I was a young boy, our family often picnicked on those rocks,
and several decades later, I took Kathy there on a vacation
to see that place of so many of my happy childhood memories.

Over the many years since I had been there, storms had destroyed
and swept away many of the homes and guest houses along the coast,
but those massive boulders remain completely unchanged.

They were exactly as I remembered from when I had played there,
and they hadn't shifted, moved or changed even the tiniest bit.

Our world, our society and the values embraced by our culture,
they have changed dramatically and shifted tremendously
since I played as a boy on those huge rocks at Cape Ann.

But our God, God's truth, God's word and God's gracious love,
these have not changed but will always remain constant,
like those immense boulders along the New England coast,
that have withstood every storm, yet are unaffected, vs. 6-7,

He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my deliverance and
my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

That is the promise and mission that Jesus Christ came to fulfill,
that through the grace and power of God in Jesus Christ,
our safe place of refuge against life's storms and changes
is the unchanging promise and assurance of grace,
and our place in the Kingdom, under the reign of God,

as Paul explained earlier to the church in Philippi, vs. 14, 16,

I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. **Only let us hold fast** to what we have attained.

The ancient city of Philippi, was located along a major trade route,
was very cosmopolitan, immoral and wildly pagan, colony of Rome.

As recent converts to Christianity,
they had much to learn about living as faithful Christians
in such an unrestrained pagan and immoral environment.

So, while Paul and the other evangelists were living there,
they tried to teach by modeling how to live out their faith.

But once Paul had moved on to spread the Good News elsewhere,
some of the Christians of Philippi, still young in their faith,
started to slip back into their former pagan ways. vs. 18-19

For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even
with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set
on earthly things.

It breaks Paul's heart, but some are headed toward destruction.

Now the ancients believed that all desires come from the belly,

and so, when Paul writes that their god is the belly,

he's talking about more than just an appetite for food.

Everything about the way they were living

was mis-focused on pleasure and feeding their every desire, vs. 19,
belly; and their minds are set on earthly things.

... their god is the

In sharp contrast, Paul writes, vs. 20-21,

But **our citizenship is in heaven**, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

Citizenship had a special meaning & significance in the Roman empire.

Philippi was a specifically designated as a Roman colony
where people could live as Roman citizens away from Rome
with their loyalty and privilege still directed toward Rome.

Drawing on that perspective and understanding of citizenship,
Paul writes of our loyalty & perspective as followers of Christ,
that yes, we are living among the corrupt depravities of this world,
but our focus must rise & remain upon the grace & promise of Christ.

Specifically, Paul was suffering in a prison-cell dungeon,
but he sees beyond his immediate suffering and circumstance
toward God's kingdom – toward the God to whom he belongs.

Yes, his physical body was in this world, locked in that prison cell.
But his true citizenship and loyalty were not to this world
nor to its values or ways or his situation in the world.
He belonged to God's power & presence, so his hope and assurance were,
that he fully trusted in his relationship through Jesus
as his fortress, safe haven from the storm, and salvation.

Though imprisoned, Paul remembers his true home & to whom he belongs,
and so, he uses that understanding and the image of citizenship,
**to teach & explain that our relationship with God changes everything
about our lives, our behavior, our attitudes, goals and loyalties.**

When James Baker was the Secretary of State, it was his practice,
that when a new ambassador was appointed to serve a foreign posting,
Baker would call that new ambassador into his office,
and ask them to point out their country on the globe.
And typically, they pointed to the country to which they were going.

And then the Secretary of State would say, "No – that's wrong.
Your country is the United States of America.
Never forget your true home and to whom your loyalty is due."

In his cell Paul knows that his true citizenship is God's kingdom,
therefore, he can stand firm and strong in Jesus Christ,
for he knows with certainty to whom his loyalty is due...

... for like the psalmist describes, God is his fortress and refuge.

His sure security is like an unchanging boulder along the coast,
**which gives him courage and strength, power and assurance
over any challenge, trouble, storm or claim of this world.**

Because God is our fortress, our rock, our salvation and safe place,
and because God's grace is limitless, that makes all the difference
in our perspective and how the Spirit guides us in this world,
as it defines how Christians live **in response to God's grace.**

Citizenship is a crucial concept even for us today.

You may be living in Philippi, or Las Cruces, NM,
but your ultimate loyalty, and your allegiance,
your citizenship is in heaven, God's Kingdom.

This isn't our home, but we are waiting for our Savior – vs. 20,

...it is from heaven, we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And while we are waiting and expecting, Paul explains that

we are also in an on-going process of being transformed, vs. 21,

He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

The form of the specific Greek word Paul uses, (μετα σχηματίζω)

helps to explain this process of our lives being transformed.

We get schematic as in a schematic drawing from that Greek word,

which is an engineer's drawing that is intended
to show how something works, functions and operates.

Paul is describing the process of our transformation,

of Jesus changing or **redrawing our blueprints, our schematics,**

describing the way we work, function & operate in the world.

That means, the way that we function and operate in the world

will gradually become more Christ-like as we grow deeper,

as we increasingly live into God's grace and Spirit.

So, Paul is urging these Christians in Philippi, vs. 17,

Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.

- as he explains in 1 Cor. 11:1 , **Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.**

As Paul was trying to live and be more like Christ, he's urging
the Philippians to follow his example of imitating Christ,
for that is how to stand firm and walk in the way of the Lord.

We know that when we connect and interact with certain people
somehow, they seem to bring out the very best & most noble in us.

When we're around them, our conversations are more elevated,
and we are more calm, gracious, more optimistic and hopeful.
They help us have a more faithful and joyful perspective.

And there are others,
who don't have that same up-lifting or building-up effect on us.

No doubt, for better or worse, we are influenced by others.

I've always been blessed with people of faith of observe and emulate,
whose living example has demonstrated God's grace and truth,
faithful Christians whose prayers showed me how to pray,
who shared the power and truth of God's word in Scripture,
and who encouraged me to dig deeper into the Bible on my own.

And so often it's been just the right influencer,
at just the right time with just the right message ---

--- no doubt, it must have been a God-thing all along.

So, in your life, who has influenced your faith and walk with God?

Who took an active interest in you, and who helped shape
your character and the person you eventually became?

Who along the way who was sent as an example to you by God?

Who helped you to dream, imagine, and reach for the top shelf?

As we are passing through and deeper into the season of Lent,

the Philippians text suggests three considerations

for our growth through self-examination and reflection.

1st We want to live as a gracious people of faith, hope and integrity.

So, who have been your spiritual mentors and influencers,

and through whose examples has the Holy Spirit of God

worked toward your spiritual growth & transformation?

If they are still alive, as a Lenten practice of gratitude & grace,

perhaps a note or phone call of appreciation for their gift to you.

As you remember who your godly mentors and influencers were,

also try to recall **what did they do** that made a difference.

As there has been those in our past who were faithful before us,
who reliably modeled Christian faith and who influenced us,
so that has been left to us - a debt we are called to repay,

our task to pass on that gift of influence entrusted to us.

2nd Our call is to help form godly character and values in others

by living out our faith, our character and values in ways

that consistently provide them a worthy model to follow.

And more powerful than anything we can ever say, are our deeds,

it's by what others see in us that gives credence to our words.

Our task is to demonstrate the truth, trust and depth of our faith

by word and deed, by our integrity and the choices we make in life,

as by our lives, the ethics we demonstrate before the world,

that makes concrete what our words of faith really mean.

Our deeds can show what is so special about God's love and grace,

and how God's truth matters and informs how we live out our lives.

3rd as we journey further into Lent this year,

it is an especially good and appropriate time
to reflect on God's goodness and grace toward us ---
- perhaps as a timeline of God's blessings and events of grace,
or make a list by writing a record of reasons to be grateful,
as you reflect & remember how God has sustained & provided.

We're not just leaves subject to the movement of the passing breeze,

but we can choose to hold fast and stand firm in the Lord,

to walk in ways that are honorable and pleasing to God,

with our constant focus on the Gospel & grace, Jesus Christ.

As the Apostle Paul explains it in our text, vs. 8-9, (*The Message*)

Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse. Put into practice what you learned from me, what you heard and saw and realized... for God brings out the very best of you.