

Hopes and Dreams

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Preacher: Aaron Hoak

[0:00] Well, turn with me in your Bibles this morning to Philippians 1. Philippians 1. As you sit there this morning, what is your dream of a perfect life?

! When you think about your perfect life, what do you think of? What do you envision? What are the non-negotiables for you of your dream life? Maybe you're leading it. Maybe you're not yet. Maybe it's still out in the future. Maybe it involves more money. Less work. More peace and quiet. Longer vacations. Calmer. More obedient children are part of your dream life. Maybe more time to be involved in ministry-related work. What is it that drives your dreams? What gives you meaning and focus in life? Dreams are a wonderful thing.

God's created us with an amazing capacity to think about the future and to anticipate and to wonder and to hope and to what we call dream. But dreams can also be a very dangerous thing because we dreamers are sinners.

[1:02] And often our dreams are tainted with or completely corrupted by our sin. And so we don't always hope for and long for and look for the right thing.

There's a quote there at the top of your handout. While our dreams can reveal our faith, they also expose the lust, greed, selfishness, fear, anger, doubt, hopelessness, and materialism of our hearts.

And isn't that true sometimes? When you think about what you're hoping for, what does it reveal about you? What does it show you about what's in your heart? If you were to find a blueprint of what God wants for your life, what His dream is for you, would it match up with what your dreams are for yourself and for your life?

2 Corinthians 5:15 says, And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again.

Often it seems our hopes and dreams seem to be more about living for ourselves than living for the One who died for us. But God's love comes into your life to change what you live for.

[2:16] That's what we're talking about in this book that we're looking at. How people change. God's love comes into your life to change what people live for. And again, I'll be quoting them frequently, won't always tell you when that is.

I'd encourage you to get a hold of this and read it. If you want to change, it has to involve your hopes and your dreams. The things that you want. Here's where many of us need real and lasting change.

We want the wrong things. And so change has to start at the heart of our desires. What we're looking forward to. Our desires are twisted and therefore our actions follow.

If what we want is the wrong thing and we're pursuing what we want, then our actions in pursuing that will reflect that sinful heart that's inside of us. And so, our authors ask, what is the point?

What does it all mean? And here's the important part. The answers we give ourselves, the meanings we give to our thoughts, circumstances, relationships, and actions move us in specific directions.

[3:21] If I think this is going to give me meaning, fulfillment, then that's going to move me to act in that direction. And so we have to be desiring, dreaming of the right thing. I'm going to give you a couple examples from the book of people who had misguided dreams, who sought meaning in the wrong place.

The first one's name is Frank. And we'll read you Frank's story and see if you resonate with either of these things. You sympathize with some of their problems, some of the things that you hear about them.

Frank was hurt. He had dedicated himself to his downtown church for years, at a time when many believers fled for the ease of suburban Christianity. He did everything he could to contribute his gifts to the ministry he loved.

Frank lived with his eyes open to ministry needs and willingly stepped in to fill them. Single, with lots of free time, Frank made the church his family, his favorite hobby, and a social network. Frank was also an avid student of his faith.

He took all the discipleship classes the church offered. He read on his own and took evening classes at the local Christian college. He signed up for elder and deacon training every time it was offered. He knew his Bible, but he was always hungry to know more.

[4:27] But Frank didn't know if he could recover from this blow. For the fifth time, he had been passed over when men were nominated for the office of elder. Frank looked at the list of men. None of them were as active in the church as he was.

Few of them knew their faith as well as he did. It didn't make sense. He sat on his bed that Sunday night and said to himself, I'm done. Within a few weeks, Frank resigned from all ministry involvements and left the church.

You begin to get an idea of what gives Frank meaning. What his hopes are. What his dreams are. And do they or do they not line up with what God wants for him? And we're going to come back to these Frank and this other one that we'll read a little bit later when we've seen some things and apply some of the things that we learned to Frank and then to Nikki.

See if any of you resonate with Nikki. Nikki didn't know why she was down. She just was. When she thought about it, she realized she had many more down days than up days.

She hated the way she looked. Her weight made her self-conscious and insecure. She had trouble keeping the house neat and clean. She tried each new diet book and every new book on the keys to domestic success, but they only left her feeling more defeated.

[5:34] She struggled each day knowing that Rob worked in an office filled with bright, attractive, and successful women. One morning, she looked in the mirror and realized that her motivation for living was slipping away.

The twins were still visiting their grandmother, so she took the phone off the hook and climbed back into bed. Any of you resonate with Nikki and her depression?

Where she finds meaning and where she's not finding it and why she's depressed? We'll come back and talk about Frank and Nikki both in a little bit.

But they're an example of people with misguided dreams seeking meaning in the wrong place.

They're stumbling along in this life and they're not finding what they're looking for. The wonderful truth is we don't have to stumble along like that.

We don't have to be saddled with discouragement, with depression, with unfulfilled dreams, because we do have a blueprint for our lives that shows us what God wants for us.

[6:31] It's in His Word. It's in this book. And we need to bring our desires and our dreams into line with what God reveals here. Our ultimate purpose is to become like Christ and live with Him forever.

How many of you, when I said, what is your dream of a perfect life, thought to become like Christ and live with Him forever? That should be our goal, our dream, our aim.

And so the author's right, and this is at the top of your page also. We want you to know how to make God's ultimate dream your purpose for living. Take what God wants for you and make it what you want.

And so the first thing we want to see is that the way we pray reveals something about our dreams, reveals what we want, what we hope for. And we want to look at Philippians 1 in just a moment. Our prayers reveal what we think we need.

We pray for what we think we need, what we want. We ask God for those things. Now we're told by God to bring our needs to Him, and so it's good and right to pray and ask regarding the things that happen in our life.

[7:35] But do we sometimes misunderstand what our genuine needs are? Do we sometimes want the wrong thing? Think of your most common prayers and compare it to Paul's as we read it here. Philippians 1, we'll read verses 3-11.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It 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. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best, and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Is that what you pray for? It wouldn't be a bad idea to take Paul's prayer occasionally and model your own after it. Paul knows the struggles of his readers, and yet he has great confidence as he thanks God and prays for them. [9:01] His confidence isn't in them. It's in the One who began a good work in them, and who he knows will complete that work, who will finish it. His confidence is in God. His confidence is in the right place.

He has joy over them because of their help in the Gospel ministry, and confident that through Christ they can become as joyful and fruitful in ministry as He has been. It shows in what he prays. And what he actually asks for is for greater love, and knowledge, and discernment, and purity, and blamelessness, the fruit of righteousness. Discernment to know what is best. That's what he wants for them. Do you pray like that? All so that God may be praised. So that He may receive the glory. Are those the things that you ask for? It's what God wants for us. We should be praying it for ourselves, and for our brothers and sisters in Christ. You say, I live in the real world. And you see a prayer like that, and you say, that doesn't make me dream. [9:59] That doesn't make me hopeful for those things. That makes me feel more helpless than I did before I walked in here this morning. Because I know I'm thinking about different things. And my hopes for purity and blamelessness, that's way too far off for me.

I can't see it. I don't hope for those things. And I don't pray for those things. But remember that the confidence isn't in us. It's in Christ who is completing the work that He began. If He began a work in you, He's going to finish it. And you can have hope and confidence, not in yourself today. You look at yourself and you will despair. You'll quit. You'll throw up your hands and say, I can't do it.

This is too much. But remember that the confidence is in Christ. And so our author is right, and it's there on your handout. No matter what you face today, you can be encouraged that God's good work continues in your life, even when you don't see it.

His presence and faithful work give us confidence. As you have that tough conversation with a friend, you can say to yourself, Christ is working right now to complete what He started in me. As you struggle with your finances, you can say to your spouse, we can get through this because Christ is working right now to complete what He has begun in us.

[11:09] When it seems that you are in a losing battle with sin, you can say, I have hope for victory because Christ is working in me right now to complete what He has begun. Do you have that kind of Christ-centered confidence?

And does it encourage you to come to God and pray based on that confidence? It should. But just because we know what we should dream about and pray for doesn't mean it comes easily.

Growth in God's grace is a process and not an event. You won't walk out of here today, I've seen the light, I've got it. It's a process. It takes time.

You know, God, from the moment He saves us until the moment we die or the moment Christ comes back is a lifelong process. We call it growth in grace. And it's a step-by-step thing.

Sin is a real enemy that we must battle continuously. The path we take is a long, a difficult one oftentimes. Individuals, friendships, churches, marriages, and neighborhoods don't turn around in a moment.

[12:15] That's why it's important to remember, again, the confidence that Paul expresses that we should have is in Christ. Christ, Christ who walked in this world, who faced the same struggles that we face, the same temptations that we face.

He's walked in our shoes. He knows. It's not like He's just up in heaven and He doesn't really understand. He says, oh, you'll be alright. He's here. Walking with you. And He was here physically on this earth and He walked it.

And He knows the struggles. He knows what it is to lose a dear friend. He knows what it is to be tempted by Satan himself. He will not leave us. He will not forsake us in the midst of our troubles.

He will finish the work that has been begun in us. What can help us then focus our dreams on the right things? Let's talk about our perspective.

Let me ask you a question that I want you to answer this morning. What can help us keep that Christ-centered focus living for Him, not for ourselves? What can help us focus our hopes and dreams on the right thing with our confidence, again, not in ourselves, but in Christ?

[13:21] What can help us with that? What are some things that we can do to help us keep the right perspective? Becky? Okay, to be in God's Word where He reveals to us what He wants for us.

That we can see what He wants. Good. Ed? And how do we do that? How do we fix our eyes on Jesus? Okay? Reading, meditating, coming together with other people who are in the body of Christ, seeing how Christ is working in their lives.

This person over here, there's so many struggles and yet I always see them with a smile. I always see them encouraged and I draw encouragement from that. We see Christ in them and we come and we hear the Word preached and we see Christ in it.

Okay, good. So we read God's Word, we fix our eyes on Christ. What else? Good. It's the body of Christ for a reason. We don't go this road alone. We need each other.

Remember the message on confessing your sins to one another and having that transparency and knowing that others are praying for you. Find encouragement, comfort, and focusing our attention on Christ.

[14:24] The thing we want to talk about this morning is keeping our focus on eternity, on what's coming. The Christian life only makes sense when we keep eternity in view.

Whether you're thinking about remodeling a home, running a marathon, going on a diet, or the Christian life, you know what helps? It helps to keep the end goal in view.

To think about where you're going. So you don't just get bogged down in all of the discouragement along the way. Two different people could look at the same house. Two people are house hunting. And they go and they look at the same house for sale and they may see two totally, completely different things.

One of them sees the disaster that it is. How much work it's going to take to make it livable. They see the rotting roof and shingles out in the yard and the old windows and the rope windows and the ropes are broken and cut and the plumbing is out of date and it needs to be updated and the decor is hopelessly outdated.

And that's all they see and it's hopeless. We can never make that house a home. And somebody else with vision looks at that house and they go, that house has a ton of character.

[15:35] And they can look forward and they can see what it will be like when they've done that work with their own hands and they've made those repairs and they've updated it and they've remodeled it and they can envision their kids playing in that yard.

And they can envision their family enjoying that home and showing hospitality at home. They've got a vision of what it could be. You know, look at it. It's the exact same house but the two people looking at it see two totally different, totally different things.

And some Christians look at their life the same way that first observer of the house does. They only see the sin. They only see hopelessness. They only see things that in their mind can't be fixed.

They can't see the potential for growth and grace. They can't see that day in glory when they'll be perfect and without it. They've got no concept of that. And so they're hopelessly discouraged.

They say, I can't change that. I can't do anything about that. The present reality is too close for such a thing to even seem possible. And so, our authors write, as you look at the house that is your life, what do you see?

[16:41] Do you see the problems and get overwhelmed? Do you give up and walk away? Does the way you look at your problems cause you to be defensive and angrily pretend they aren't there? Do you escape into TV, food, busyness, or other distractions?

Or do you see the problems through the eyes of Christ with hope in His presence, His work, and the power to change you? Again, it's not about you. Oh, I can do it. You see Christ and the ability to work in and through you.

In light of Philippians 1, 3-11, how does God welcome you to look at life in a brand new way? What does God want you to see? As you consider your life in light of this hope-infused passage, how is this moment a step towards the final destination God has planned for you?

The process of change, the rehabbing of your house is going somewhere. Of that, you can be confident. God started the work and He's going to finish it. And when you look at your life, you should be able to get a glimpse of that.

That's hard for us to imagine being perfect because we're so far from it. But that's where we're headed. That's what God has promised us. And He's not going to leave you in a ditch in the middle of the road along the way.

[17 : 45] He's going to pick you up every time you fall and He's going to bring you with Him until you get to glory. And you can have that hope and that confidence. Do you see, when you look at your life and you see all the trouble, do you see any encouragement there?

Because of who Christ is and what God has promised to do? Or do you only see a helpless, hopeless, tangled mess? We're living in this present world, this present age.

And there's a beginning to it and a middle and an end. And we're in the middle. It began in Genesis 1. It'll end when Jesus comes again. And as we run the race in the middle, we'll do well to fix our eyes on the goal, on the prize at the end, when we will be perfect, when we will be made like Christ, when there will be no more suffering and temptation.

It's one of the reasons I believe that the book of Revelation is in the Bible. And so we can see what happens in the end. You see that Christ triumphs.

That the good guys win. That all of His people are gathered there with Him in glory and they're perfect. The biblical story makes no sense without eternity.

[18 : 50] This is our authors. There has to be a better end than what we are living in right now. Sin has to be conquered. People have to be purified. The cosmos has to be restored. Anything less would be a universal defeat.

All of the suffering, brokenness, trial, sacrifice, and battle would make no sense if God isn't taking us somewhere. Following Christ has been a colossal waste of time.

There has to be more than this and there is. If all you see is this life and you're going through all of these struggles and there's nothing waiting for us at the end, then you are wasting your time.

And that's why we need to keep eternity in perspective. I'm going to skip that quote and we'll move on. He talks about, you know, you taking all the heat at work and being passed over for promotions because you live a life of integrity.

That's stupid. That's foolish. If there's nothing greater waiting for us at the end, if there's not a reward, if there's not blessing, if there's not holiness waiting for us at the end, your attempts to live a life of holiness and this life are a waste.

[19 : 56] But of course they are not because there is a goal. There is eternity. So turn over with me to Revelation 7. Let's just get a little glimpse of it this morning. A little taste of eternity. Let's see. Revelation 7.

Pick up the reading in verse 9 and read to the end of the chapter. This is where you're headed.

Okay? If you're a child of God. After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures.

They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God saying, Amen. Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen. Then one of the elders asked me, These in white robes, who are they? And where did they come from? I answered, Sir, you know. And he said, These are they who have come out of the great tribulation.

[21 : 22] They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. When He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them.

Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them nor any scorching heat for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

That's where you're going, child of God. And there's a quote there on your handout. Do you see yourself in the crowd? These saints are people just like you.

Like you, they suffered the scorching heat of earthly life. Like you, they went through God's process of radical change. Now they have reached their final destination. They stand before God's throne purified and free with a full welcome into the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords, their Savior, their Shepherd Lamb.

Picture yourself there because in God's story you are there. This is your destination. This is where God is taking you. You will make it through the heat. Someday, you will stand before the throne.

[22:36] wisdom. Why? You've been given the fullness of the Holy Spirit. What God has begun in you, He will complete. Your destiny has already been decided.

The one who decided it will give you all you need to get there. So, I ask you at the beginning, what are your dreams for a perfect life?

I ask you again, the end. what is your dream of a perfect life? What are you fixing in your home? What is it that you can't live without? When we dream of this life being different and better, sometimes we may well be dreaming of something that runs totally contrary to God's purpose for it. And so, make sure your dreams and hopes align with God that you are pursuing His kingdom and not your own. Be careful what you dream. And may God give us grace to walk this life with our eyes fixed on Him, on eternity, and not on ourselves.

[23:42] Let's live for the one who died for us. Jesus gave up everything for us. Shouldn't we be willing to give up what we have to live for Him? We've got just a couple of moments.

Any comments? Anything to add to that? Any questions about fixing our eyes on eternity? I couldn't help you to think about Romans 8.28 when you finished up the handout, Pastor.

We know all things. We're to the good also we love it, but we're told according to His purpose. All things. Good. It's hard to see it at times. I've been through that this year myself, but it's, nonetheless, it's true.

It can be hard to see sometimes. And the way we respond shows whether or not we believe that there are some times. And that's a good reminder for us to draw us back to Christ and find our hope in Him.

Good. Dennis? I don't think we can underestimate the need for being in the Word of God. Mmm. Mixing our eyes on Jesus.

[24:42] Our God turns to the fact that we're in the face. Amen. God tells us what He wants. And He's shown us how it can be ours through Christ.

And if you get far away from this book, then you get far away from that right perspective that keeps us on the right path. Good. Any other thoughts before we close today?

Roger? I can think all of us, you know, starting out life and our immaturity has set our goals all way too low, but then as soon as we have this internal perspective and we begin to see that we can do things that are totally out of our power and it's all the grace of God, and then we start heading in the right direction.

So I think like most people say, they go down, they get married, they have all these goals, they have their career, mind, big family, and then about midlife, find out that it's all meaningless to find out that you're not going to get there.

It's not important to get there. And so, in terms of perspective, we start to live. Amen.

[25:52] Amen. We need that, we need that perspective. Yeah. When God, by His grace alone, uses that perspective, what's freedom happening?

Amen. anxiety, and fear, and what is, and it's just freedom. That's right. That's why I hope you can get a glimpse of what our authors are getting after in this book, how people change.

it's not all about us. It's about God, and that does give us hope. That is free. That's liberating. Well, may God give us grace to set our hopes, our affections on the right thing, and that will set our actions on the right thing.

There is hope for change. You're stuck in the mire, you don't see any possibility there's hope in Christ, and so you cling to Him today. We're dismissed.