

September 29, 2013 by Steve Brandon



Thankful And Prayerful

Philippians 1:3-6

1. For their Past (verses 3-4)
2. For their Partnership (verse 5)
3. For their Destiny (verse 6)

This morning, we will be looking at four verses in Philippians, chapter 1. Paul writes, ...

Philippians 1:3-6

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

My message this morning is entitled, "Thanksgiving and Prayer." These are the dominating actions in these three verses.

Thankfulness comes right there in verse 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you." Prayer comes in verse 4, "always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all." Everything else in these verses revolve around these two thoughts. When Paul thought about the Philippians, he was "thankful and prayerful."

These two themes often occur at the beginning of Paul's epistles. When he wrote to the Thessalonians, he said, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers" (1 Thess. 1:2). When he wrote to those in Colossae, Paul wrote, "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you" (Col. 1:3). When he wrote to those in Ephesus, Paul wrote, "I ... do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers" (Eph. 1:15-16). To Philemon, Paul wrote, "I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers" (Philemon 4).

These two themes dominated Paul's letters because they dominated his life. Paul was a thankful man. Paul was a prayerful man.

In many ways, Paul merely followed his own counsel. Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." In all things, we are to be thankful and prayerful. Paul was.

This is why he could write, ...

Philippians 1:3-4

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,

The obvious question at this point is this: What about you? Are you a thankful person? Are you a prayerful person? Paul writes, "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

When things take place in your life, are you thankful? When concerns come upon you, are you prayerful? When you think of others, are you thankful? When you encounter difficulties in your life, are you prayerful?

What made Paul so thankful and so prayerful? Was it his circumstances? No. When he wrote this letter, he was in prison in Rome (1:13), hardly a good situation. Was it the peace that he was experiencing? No. There were those outside of the prison seeking to cause him distress (1:17).

What then? What made Paul so thankful? The way that God was working in the lives of the Philippians. That's what made him thankful. In fact, in these four verses, Paul points out three things for which he is thankful and prayerful.

Let's look at the first one. Paul was thankful and prayerful ...

1. For their Past (verses 3-4)

That is, for what all the ways that God worked in the lives of the Philippians. Paul was thankful for their faith. He was thankful every time that he thought of them. Paul writes, "I thank my God in all my **remembrance** of you."

Paul reflects upon all of his experiences with the Philippians, and gives thanks to God. He remembers the day that he and Silas walked into Philippi (Acts 16:12). He remembers the first few days that they spent there (Acts 16:12). He remembers that Sabbath day morning down by

the river, where he first met those women who had assembled there (Acts 16:13). He remembers how he began speaking to them about Christ (Acts 16:13) and how the Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond to the things of which Paul spoke (Acts 16:14). He remembers how she believed and was baptized (Acts 16:15) and how she urged them saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay" (Acts 16:15). He remembers those pleasant days. And every time that he remembered them, he thanked the Lord.

And it wasn't all pleasant in Philippi. There was that slave girl that "greatly annoyed" Paul by her constant crying out (Acts 16:17-18). And then, there were the false accusations (Acts 16:19-21), and a night in prison (Acts 16:24-25). Yet, through it all, Paul was thankful and prayerful.

Remember how he and Silas were "praying and singing hymns of praise to God" in prison? (Acts 16:25). Eventually, it led to the conversion of the jailer, when he asked, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

Paul and Silas were invited into his home and they came and "spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house" (Acts 16:32). This jailor believed (Acts 16:34). His whole household believed (Acts 16:34), and they all were baptized (Acts 16:33). And when Paul remembers these things, he is thankful.

Philippians 1:3
I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,

Whenever he thought of the Philippians, his thankfulness for them ascended to the Lord. But, this wasn't the only time that Paul had visited those in Philippi. If you remember from last week, he visited them twice more on his missionary journeys. That makes three times the Paul had visited and seen these people. And I'm sure that his mind was full of memories of those visits.

Surely, he saw the church grow during those visits. And surely, he met those who had come to faith through the witness of those in the church at Philippi. It was probably during one of those visits that he met Epaphroditus, a faithful servant of the Philippians. Paul says in chapter 2, verse 30 that he was willing to risk his life and actually "came close to death for the work of Christ" (Phil. 2:30).

He probably met Clement during one of those visits. Paul called him a "fellow worker" whose name is in the book of life (Phil. 4:3). Surely, he met Euodia and Syntyche on one of those visits as well. And so, Paul was no stranger to the work that God was accomplishing in and through those in Philippi.

He knew what God was doing among them. And he rejoiced when he thought about them. And he thanked God for them. And he prayed for them.

Furthermore, Paul remembered their kindness to him. In chapter 4, we read about how they sent several financial gifts to Paul to support his ministry. Those in Philippi had a heart for the gospel. And from their poverty, they supported Paul's work. And as all of these things came to mind, Paul was thankful.

Philippians 1:3
I thank my God in **all** my remembrance of you,

Whether it was Paul's first-hand witness of the church; whether it was through the second-hand testimony of Epaphroditus; whether it was reflecting upon how generous they had been to Paul, He was thankful.

Notice the superlatives in his prayer (i.e. "always" and "every"):

Philippians 1:4
always offering prayer with joy in my **every** prayer for you all.

These words express his earnestness in prayer. When Paul thought of the Philippians, he always turned his thoughts heavenward, lifting up prayers to God for them. And this was no burden for Paul. It's not like he was required to spend his time each day in his closet, praying for those in Philippi in drudgery. No, Paul was thankful and prayerful and joyful. He says in verse that he was ...

Philippians 1:4
always offering prayer **with joy** in my every prayer for you all.

And it's right here that we see the theme of Philippians come through loud and clear. What's the theme of Philippians? "Rejoice in the Gospel." And here in verses 3 and 4, we find Paul rejoicing in the effects of the gospel. When he thinks about the Philippians, what does he remember? He remembers how the gospel had its effect in their lives. He remembers how they came to faith. He remembers how they told others of Jesus. He remembers how others came to faith in Christ. He remembers how they grew in the gospel. He remembers their sacrifice in giving to Paul, that the work of the gospel would progress.

That's why Paul prays so earnestly. Because he rejoices in the gospel, and desires that it would progress.

Now, here's a great point of application. It's all well and good to look at how Paul was rejoicing in how the gospel took root in the Philippians.

But, how much do you rejoice when the gospel takes root at Rock Valley Bible Church? Is your joy in the gospel? Do you rejoice in the gospel? I trust you do. There is nothing more exciting than seeing people come to embrace the gospel. There is nothing more exciting than seeing people come to faith in Christ, because you know of their eternal joy that awaits them and because you know that the glory of Christ will abound through their lives and throughout all eternity!

But, here's the question. To what extent are you thankful and prayerful? Do you really pray with thanksgiving whenever you think of those at Rock Valley Bible Church? Do you really pray with thanksgiving whenever your witness people growing in the gospel at Rock Valley Bible Church? Seeing people grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ? Seeing people more passionate for Jesus. Seeing people more quickly confess their sins.

This is how Paul prayed for those in Philippi. Every time that he remembered them, he prayed for them. Is this your heart for Rock Valley Bible Church? Unlike Paul, you don't have to remember some events that took place a decade ago. Unlike Paul, you can see the Lord work on a daily or weekly basis right here at church. Do you find your joy when the gospel flourishes here at church? I think you do.

But, how about this. Do you actively pray for the Lord to make the gospel abound at Rock Valley Bible Church? Do you actively pray for the Lord to open hearts, like Lydia's? (Acts 16:14). Do you actively pray for the Lord to bring people to faith, like the jailor in Philippi? (Acts 16:33-34).

A few weeks ago, I was super encouraged at our prayer meeting, because the vast majority of prayer requests in that meeting were for those outside of Christ, who need Jesus. People were sharing of opportunities that they had recently to speak with others about the gospel. And they were requesting that we pray for the Lord to open their hearts to the gospel. The majority of our time was spent praying for the Lord to work in the hearts of people to show them their sin, to show them their need for Jesus, and to grant them repentance leading to eternal life. It was an exciting time.

May the Lord be pleased to answer our prayers. May the Lord cause the gospel to flourish at Rock Valley Bible Church. I encourage you all to be praying.

I encourage you to come to our prayer meeting. We have tried to make it as convenient as possible. You simply need to show up an hour early to church. We begin at 9:00 in the family room. We spend a half an hour praying for the Lord's blessing upon this church. We pray for the Lord to work among us and to spread His glory throughout the face of the earth through us.

My vision for the prayer meeting is that everyone in this church would attend it. That's why we have our prayer meeting an hour before our worship service. Too often churches have prayer meetings on Wednesday evenings, during the AWANA program, during the youth program, during the choir practice, during the scheduled counseling appointments. And what happens is that the leftover people -- those not involved in the Wednesday night activities -- might come. But, we have tried to remove all barriers to our prayer meeting, that all might be able to come.

Right now, there are about 30 of us who consistently gather and seek the Lord's face together. I would love to see more. I would love to see us outgrow the family room and move into the auditorium, because so many of us are attending.

I know that for some of you with small children, it might be difficult to come. I know that for some of you, you work the midnight shift, and the extra hour of sleep is precious to you. I know that there are a thousand other difficulties in your lives that might prevent you from coming. I know that.

But, I do ask you this question. If you are not attending the prayer meeting, why not? Perhaps you aren't interested in praying with the church. Perhaps you don't see it as a priority. Perhaps you want an extra hour of sleep on Sunday. If those are your reasons, that's OK. I just want for you to know, for yourself why you don't come. I want to encourage you to make the effort in coming and praying for the Lord to work among us.

James 4:2 says, "You do not have because you do not ask." Could it be that the Lord is waiting to pour out a giant blessing upon this church until we ask?

Here in Philippians 1:3-4, we see Paul earnestly praying for the Philippians. He was thankful and prayerful For their Past (verses 3-4). Secondly, Paul was thankful and prayerful ...

2. For their Partnership (verse 5)

We see this in verse 5, ...

Philippians 1:5
in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

Now, the only way that this verse makes sense is to get a running start.

Philippians 1:3-5
I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

Verses 3 and 4 call to mind how the gospel impacted the Philippians. Verse 5 brings to mind what they actually did with the gospel. Paul says that they "participated" in the gospel.

The ESV and NIV translate it this way, "because of your partnership in the gospel." That's why I'm calling my second point, "for their partnership." I think that this word captures Paul's heart most clearly.

But, let's first get to what this word actually means. The King James versions translate it most literally, "for your fellowship in the gospel." The Greek word translated here, "participation" or "partnership" or "fellowship" is *koinwnia* (*koinonia*). If you have been around church for a while, you have probably heard this word. Literally, it means, "sharing," or "having something in common." Most often, it is translated, "fellowship." This is a term that Christians often use when they talk about social gatherings. Church buildings often have rooms called, "The Fellowship Hall," where everyone stands around eating cookies and drinking red punch. The idea is that sharing of lives takes place in this room.

Fellowship is much larger than this, of course. Fellowship was one of the marks of the early church. Acts 2:42 says it this way, "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." They were continually devoting themselves to fellowship. This doesn't mean that they were committed to eating cookies and drinking their lemonade together. It means that they were committed to sharing their lives with each other.

A few verses later in Acts, we read that "all those who had believed were together and had all things in common." The word translated, "common" is *koina* (*koina*), which is related to that which is translated "fellowship." The next verse shares a picture of what this means: "and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need" (Acts 2:44-45).

Such was their commitment to share their lives together. They shared their time in gathering together. They shared their property in helping each other. That's what this word, "fellowship" means. It means that you share your life with others.

So, let's come back to Philippians. In verse 5, we see that Paul was thankful and prayerful.

Philippians 1:5
in view of [because of] your **participation** in the gospel from the first day until now.

Or, translated another way, ...

Philippians 1:5
in view of [because of] your **sharing** in the gospel from the first day until now.

Here's what Paul is saying. From the very first day that the church began in Philippi, they were committed to sharing their lives and their resources for the furtherance of the gospel.

Chapter 4 gives us a clue to know what Paul's talking about. Look at verse 15, ...

Philippians 4:15-17
You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account.

In other words, when the gospel came into Macedonia, people were being saved. Churches were being established. But, few were giving financially to help the effort in other places. However, the Philippians were. They were "sharing" their resources with Paul to help the gospel progress.

You might find it interesting here that the word in verse 15, "no church shared with me," is the verb form of our previous word translated "fellowship". No church "shared with me." No church "fellowshipped with me." No church "partnered with me." No church "participated [financially] with me," except for you alone.

From the very first day of their existence, the church in Philippi had a heart for the gospel. They didn't keep it to themselves. They shared what they could with Paul, so that the gospel could go forward. This is the reality of all ministry. There needs to be a partnership.

For instance, here at Rock Valley Bible Church, we have a partnership going on. Week by week, you all are gracious to give to the work of this church. You place your financial gifts in the offering box in the back. A portion of that gift certainly goes toward the upkeep of our church building. A portion of that gift certainly goes toward the maintenance of our ministry. But, a portion of that gift also goes to me, for the support of my family.

You free me up, so that I have the time and energy to serve you all in the life of the church. A good portion of my time is spent in prayer and the ministry of the word. A good portion of my week is dedicated to preparing to preach each Sunday in the public ministry of the word. A good portion of my week is focused upon the private ministry of the word as well.

In fact, I was counting the other day of how I have 11 scheduled meetings every week with people of this church. That's not including our Sunday morning gatherings of prayer meeting and worship. Nor is it including the various calls I receive throughout the week, or the various email communications that I send throughout the week, or notes that I write, or the various projects that come up from time to time, or the various visits that I make to see your kids play soccer or baseball or to enjoy a dinner at your home or to visit you in the hospital or to make some other sort of visit to your home.

Of these 11 meetings each week, some of these meetings are with individual men in the church. There are strategic men in the church with whom I meet one on one every week. Some are with groups of men (with elders or with other men with whom I'm seeking to impart my life). Some are with families (like with our small groups). Some are with the kids from the neighborhood (an outreach).

And in all of these meetings, administration, and communication, my aim is to see the gospel further progress in the life of our church. And without your financial partnership in these things, I couldn't be doing all of these things. I am thankful for your partnership in the gospel. I feel so blessed to be able to commit myself fully to the ministry of this church. Thank you.

But, we have a partnership that extends beyond our church. Most of you know that we currently are allocating 19% of our undesignated giving to missions. That is, ministry that is focused beyond us and our church. But, ministry that is directed toward making a world-wide impact.

Last week, Gary told of how we were able to give \$10,000 to Farms International to provide seed money for micro-loans in foreign lands. For years, we have given to First Love International to help Bob Clinton and his ministry in Nepal and India. Last year, we were able to give \$15,000, to go towards the building costs of the children's home in Siliguri. We recently committed to giving \$5,000 a year to help Leadership Resources and their pastoral training program in India. We have given to Slavic Gospel Association. We have given to ministry in Albania.

When I say, "we," I mean, "you." You have given to all of these things. What a joy and a privilege it is to be partners in the furtherance of the gospel through these ministries. And it all happens week by week as you all give of your gifts to this church.

Pray for us elders, as we decide how best to give away these funds on your behalf. When you take 19% of our income as a church, it begins to grow. We are constantly seeking ways to give it away to those who will further the gospel. We aren't merely throwing money out there. We are investing deeply in a few ministries that we know and trust. We are constantly seeking to increase that percentage of what we give away.

God has richly blessed us our nation. Our wealth surpasses the wealth of any nation that has ever lived on this planet. Jesus said, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required" (Luke 12:48). In America, we have been given much. Much is required of us to give. Our goal at Rock Valley Bible Church is to give away half of our income to the work of missions around the world. Let's rejoice in the opportunity we have to partner with others in the gospel!

And what we give away as a church is only a portion of the partnership that we have with the gospel. I'm sure that many of you financially support others who are serving the Lord in furthering the gospel. I think that's great. That's above and beyond what you are giving to the church.

I received a note this week from a missionary family that our family has personally supported for years. Here's what the note said.

"Steve and Yvonne,

Hello dear friends! How are you doing? ... Thank you for being a blessing to our family. Let's get together soon so we can hear about SR's trip to 'the fatherland' (as we call it).

Thank you for continuing to preach and teach the Word of God with passion and clarity, Steve. May the Lord grant more fruit in the days ahead.

Thank you for your prayers as we mobilize more for the harvest field in the Neo-ottoman World. We are grateful for your partnership in the advance of the gospel."

This sounds a lot like Paul's letter to the Philippians. "[I'm thankful and prayerful for all of you] ... in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now" (verse 5). It only makes sense. Remember a few weeks ago, I told you that this letter is really a long thank you note. Paul was thanking the Philippians for their financial support of his ministry.

In chapter 4, verse 18, Paul writes,

Philippians 4:18

But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

The church in Philippi had just sent a gift to Paul through Epaphroditus. And now, Paul is sending him back with this letter of thanks.

The church in Philippi had supported Paul early in his ministry. And now, recently, just before the writing of the letter, they were once again able to support Paul financially. It gave Paul great joy.

Philippians 4:10

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

Here's Paul, "Rejoicing in the gospel." He is rejoicing at how the Lord has stirred the hearts of these dear saints to give to see the gospel progress. And to all of this, I simply say, may we at Rock Valley Bible Church have a similar heart. May we have the heart of the church at

Philippi to give. May we have the heart of Paul to rejoice in the gospel.

Well, let's move on to my third (and final) point this morning. Paul was Thankful and Prayerful For their Past (verses 3-4) and For their Partnership (verse 5). Thirdly, ...

3. For their Destiny (verse 6)

We see this in verse 6.

Philippians 1:6

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Here we see Paul, rejoicing in the gospel once again. He was rejoicing in the fact that when God begins a work, he will finish that work.

My home is a testimony to unfinished projects. I have a list on a whiteboard in our kitchen of all of the projects I need to do. They simply aren't getting done. I have projects that I need to finish that aren't getting finished. But, alas, such is not the case with the Lord. When He begins a work in our hearts, he will finish that work.

Theologians often call this, "The Perseverance of the Saints." In other words, when someone truly comes to faith in Christ, they will never lose that faith. It's not because of some power in them. Rather, it's because of the preserving power of God in our lives. In fact, many theologians call this, "The Preservation of the Saints."

Jesus said it this way, "this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day" (John 6:40). Elsewhere Jesus said, ...

John 10:27-29

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

What God begins, He completes.

Philippians 1:6

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Why is Paul so confident? Because he has seen fruit in the lives of the Philippians. He saw them believe. He has seen their heart for the gospel, from the first day of their conversion. He saw them several years after the church began. They were continuing in their faith. He had seen their heart for the gospel, here, some 10 years after the founding of the church when Paul wrote this letter.

And when people persevere in the faith, it gives evidence that God has truly begun that work in their lives. That's why Paul can say, "I am confident of this very thing." Because, indeed, God had begun this work. Indeed, God has continued this work. Surely, God will complete this work.

See, there are many people who begin the Christian life who never end the Christian life. I'm sure that you know people like that. They pray some prayer. They make some sort of commitment to Christ. They seek to reform their lives. But, after some time, they are no longer interested in the things of God. And when you see these people, you can be assured that God never began a work in them. They started something themselves, something that they never could complete on their own.

But, when God starts a work in a heart, it will come to completion. And this is what happened in Philippi. God started the work.

Do you remember how Luke describes what took place when Paul initially came to Philippi? I will read from Acts 16:14, "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." You see the Lord working behind the scenes, beginning His work in Philippi.

I believe that it started long before they ever came to Philippi. It began when Paul and Silas and Timothy tried to go into Asia, but they were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6). It began when Paul and Silas and Timothy tried to go into Bithynia and "the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them" (Acts 16:7). It began when Paul had the vision in the night of the man from Macedonia saying, "come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). Paul rightly concluded "that God had called [them] to preach the gospel to them" (Acts 16:10).

You see God working to direct their steps. As Proverbs 16:9 says, "the mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." And that's what you see. God was directing their steps to bring the gospel to Macedonia, because He had some women who needed to hear the gospel. So, they crossed the Aegean sea and came to Philippi. Paul and Silas and Timothy had gone down to the river to this place of prayer, and they encountered these women. And it was no accident that Paul encountered these women. It was a divine appointment.

This became clear as they spoke of Jesus to her. Surely they spoke of how He was the promised Savior of the Old Testament (Acts 13:23). Surely they spoke of how He lived, "How he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). Surely they spoke of his death, how He was crucified by the Romans (Acts 13:28-29). Surely they spoke of his resurrection, how He was raised from

the dead according to the Scriptures.^[1] Surely they spoke of how those who believe in Him are freed from their sins (Acts 13:38-39).

And as they were speaking, God was working. He was opening Lydia's heart to believe. This doesn't happen all of the time. There were plenty of people to whom Paul spoke whose hearts were closed, and who didn't believe in what he said. And if you have been out and about speaking with others about Jesus, there are plenty of people to whom you speak whose hearts are closed, and who don't believe what you say. But there are times when God works, and He opens hearts to believe -- like Lydia and like the Philippian jailor. And it's thrilling to see.

When you see it, it will give you great reasons to rejoice in the gospel. And this is what Paul was doing. He was rejoicing in the gospel! He was rejoicing in the fact that ...

Philippians 1:6

... He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

He had seen their fruit over the past decade of their lives and knew that the Lord had indeed begun a good work in them. And Paul knew that God's work would continue until the "day of Christ Jesus." This is the day when Christ returns to this earth. This is the day when brings ultimate salvation to all who have believed. He will bring us into His kingdom. He will give us new bodies. We will be with Jesus forever! Paul is thankful and prayerful and joyful for God's work in the gospel.

Paul was thankful and prayerful For their Past (verses 3-4). He was thankful and prayerful For their Partnership (verse 5). He was thankful and prayerful For their Destiny (verse 6). And the obvious point of application here is this, has God begun a good work in your heart?

If Paul would look over your life, much like he observed the lives of those in Philippi, and if Paul would see your life, would he rejoice, saying, "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus"? Perhaps you are here this morning and the Lord has never begun a work in your life. I call you to seek the Lord. "Let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found" (Psalm 32:6).

Jesus said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). See your sin. See your need of a Savior. And come to Jesus, the only one who is able to save you from your sin. And know that if you come to Him, He will never cast you out.

You can look forward to the day of Christ Jesus. Not as a day of judgment, which that day will be to those who fail to believe. But, as a day of ultimate salvation! You can look forward to the day of Christ Jesus as the day when all is made right! And you will enjoy His everlasting grace!

I close with a quote from Barbara Duguid's book entitled, "Extravagant Grace." In this book, she outlines John Newton's pastoral theology regarding sanctification. It fits well with our text. She writes, ...

So what are you to do if you are reading this and you begin to suspect that you are still a baby Christian and not quite as mature as you thought? Should you be discouraged? What if this chapter describes someone you are mentoring or sounds like your spouse, your children, your parents, or even your pastor? Should you panic? John Newton's answer is, "Absolutely not!" His calm and steady assertion that the God who began a good work in each Christian will carry it on to the day of completion (Phil. 1:6) is an enormous source of comfort and relief. Spiritual growth to maturity is God's work from beginning to end, and he alone will get the credit. The same God who made the universe out of nothing and who counts the hairs on your head will have his way with you in all things. He does not ordain the beginning and the end of your story only to leave the middle part--your life as a believer here on earth--up to you! That means that, at this very moment, you are exactly as holy and mature in your faith as God wants you to be. He cannot be disappointed in you or surprised by you if he is the one controlling the entire process of growth from start to finish. Furthermore, all the people whom you love and wish were more mature are also exactly where God wants them to be right now. He always gets his way and you cannot stop him!

Praise God for this good news! Contrary to popular belief, our spiritual growth is not up to us, nor is the spiritual growth of the people around us. This misunderstanding can lead us to much inward anxiety and even abusive behavior if we try to force people to understand truths that they are not ready to hear. We need to listen carefully to people's stories and seek to discern what God is and isn't doing in them rather than attempt to force them to achieve instant maturity. ^[2]

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 29, 2013 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Acts 13:30, 33, 34, 37.

[2] Barbara R. Duguid, "Extravagant Grace," p. 48.