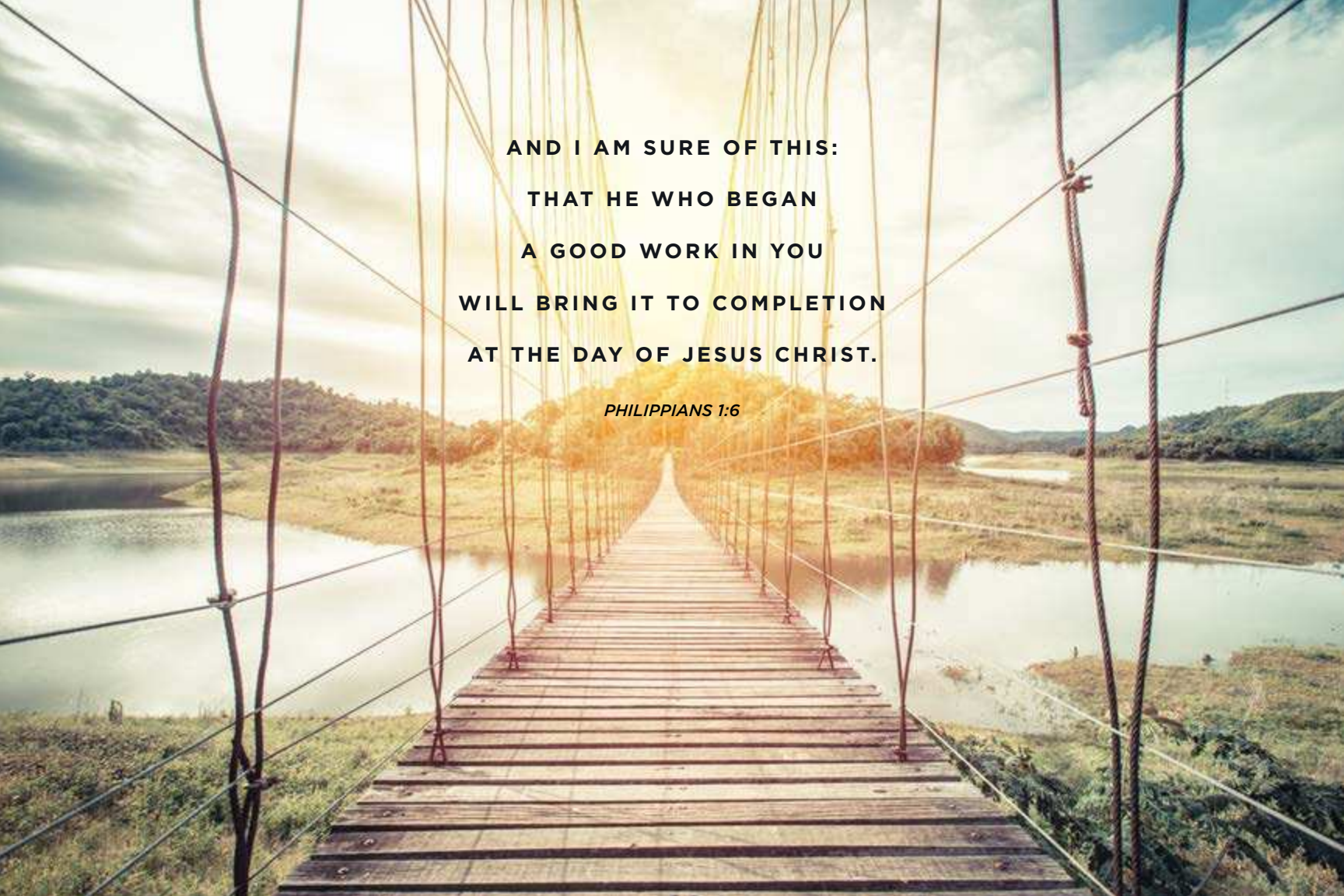


*Change.*

HOW GOD TRANSFORMS US



A wooden suspension bridge spans across a calm lake. The bridge is made of wooden planks and is supported by thick ropes. In the distance, a bright light emanates from the end of the bridge, creating a strong lens flare effect that illuminates the scene. The background shows a landscape with green hills and a cloudy sky.

**AND I AM SURE OF THIS:  
THAT HE WHO BEGAN  
A GOOD WORK IN YOU  
WILL BRING IT TO COMPLETION  
AT THE DAY OF JESUS CHRIST.**

*PHILIPPIANS 1:6*



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# A LETTER FROM PASTOR MIKE

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We are in a season of tremendous blessing at Grace. God is at work in our church, and we're seeing people change in all kinds of ways.

People are rediscovering the power of scripture — or learning it for the first time. Worshipers are learning how to seek and honor God through new songs and ancient confessions and creeds. Men and women are connecting with other believers in authentic biblical community. Struggling marriages are being renewed, and people are finding purpose in Christ. Children and students are learning the gospel and seeing the person and the love of Jesus in every Bible story we tell.

We're also seeing Grace grow and change as a whole, as we launch two new campuses in Clermont and Lake Nona. I couldn't be more thrilled and proud of these teams, who have gone out as missionaries to our city. Our heart and prayer for these campuses is the same for all other outposts of Grace — that they will grow up into mature, faithful, and passionate places of hope for their neighbors.

And we will see more changes as we head into the new year, with the opening of our Church Planting Center and a home for our Orlando campus. Construction is underway, and we are so excited to share everything that's happening with you as we move in to the fall. This facility is God's unexpected and undeserved gift to us, and we are praying that we will use every inch of this simple space to share the hope of Christ with Central Florida.

The reason for all this change is because Jesus has changed us. He has called us to lift Him up as the hope of the world. We plant churches because from the earliest first-century days of our faith, the Church is the means and method He established to bring the gospel message to cities, towns, neighborhoods, and homes.

**The Church is His agent of change.** That's why we are starting our fall by studying the founding of the church at Philippi in the book of Acts, and learning how God changed the vastly diverse people there in vastly diverse ways.

## A LETTER FROM PASTOR MIKE

But with all of our stretching and growing and forward motion, there are some things about Grace that will never change. We are a place where the gospel is treasured and God is exalted. We're also a place where we take God a lot more seriously than we take ourselves.

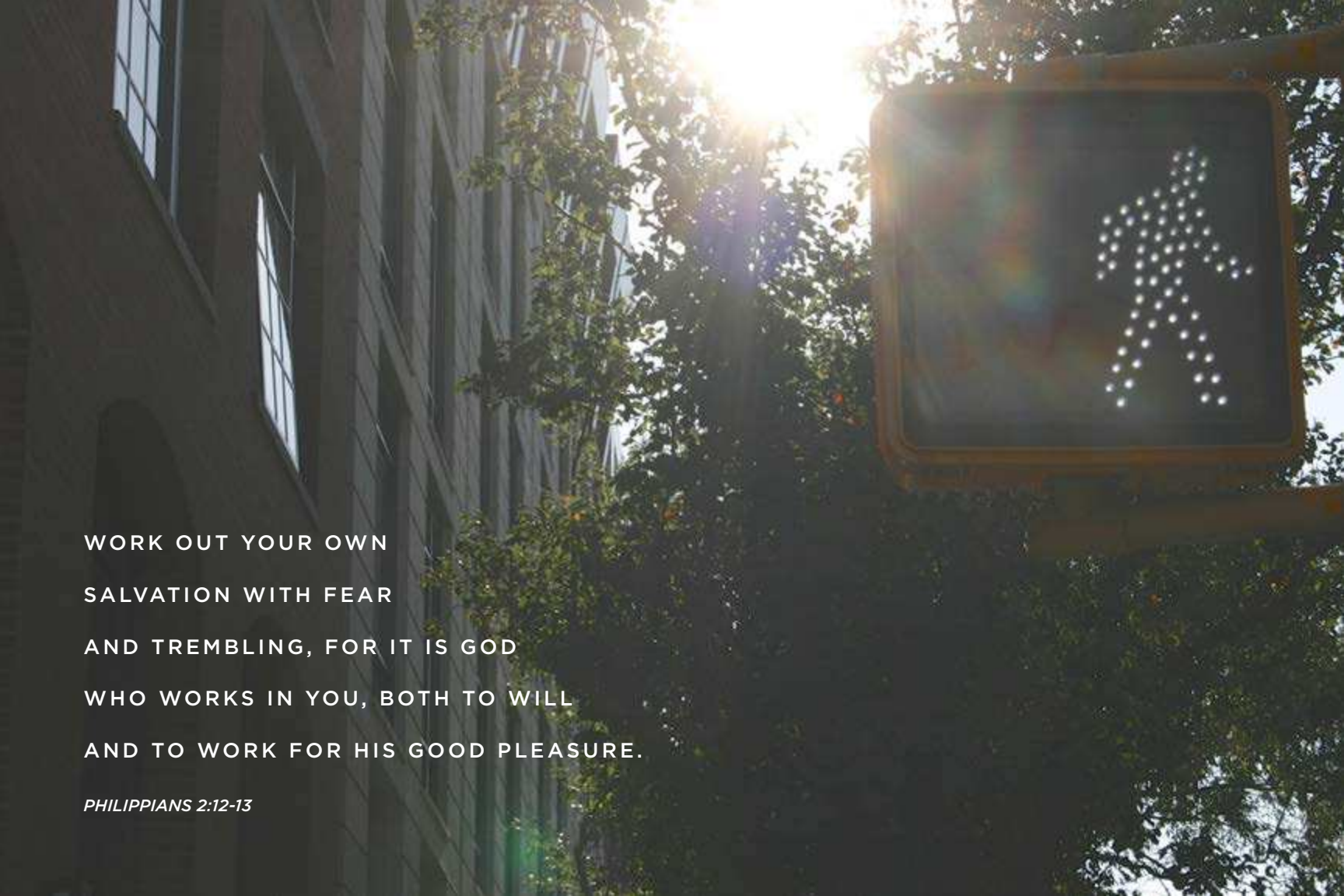
Our culture is one of God's gifts to us as a church. We have a unique ethos that combines a casual and relaxed atmosphere with serious thought and serious purpose. We love to study the scriptures, and we love to laugh. Theology is important to us, but so is being helpful and practical.

And while we are passionate about growing and reaching more people, we're more about going out than going up. That's why we're thrilled to send our best people out to new campuses to share God's love with new kids, students, and adults.

So while there are many things changing right now, and we always pray for changes in your life, you can know that the most important things to Grace are always going to be the most important things to Grace. I feel tremendously blessed to be part of what God is building into His kingdom through this church.

I love you all,

**Mike Adkins**  
*Senior Pastor*



WORK OUT YOUR OWN  
SALVATION WITH FEAR  
AND TREMBLING, FOR IT IS GOD  
WHO WORKS IN YOU, BOTH TO WILL  
AND TO WORK FOR HIS GOOD PLEASURE.

*PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13*



# BACKGROUND: THE CITY OF PHILIPPI

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The Philippi that Paul, Silas, and their church-planting team reached in 49-50 AD was a city with a proud history, economic prosperity, political clout, tourist attractions, and an up-and-coming energy.

Incredible diversity among socio-economic groups and tensions between races, classes, and cultures make Philippi sound much like the world we know today. **It also makes the unity of the people in the brand new church here impossible to imagine apart from Christ.** Understanding the social and political realities of this important city will help you as we study the founding of this church in Acts.

Four hundred years earlier, this urban location had been conquered by King Philip II of Macedonia, and to celebrate, he named it after himself — Philippi. For three hundred years, it was a leading Greek city.

Then, in 43 BC, Julius Caesar’s nephew Octavian and the general Marc Antony defeated Caesar’s assassins in a decisive battle fought just outside Philippi. To celebrate, they constituted Philippi as a Roman colony.

Suddenly, the citizens of Philippi had the same legal rights as the citizens of Rome. They could buy and sell land, were exempt from land and poll taxes, and were entitled to protection from the Roman army. It also meant they had the identity of being members of the most prosperous, powerful city in the world. Philippi eventually became a haven for retired army veterans, as they were given land and government jobs as a reward, or pension, for their years of faithful service.

The Via Egnatia, the major East-West Roman highway, ran through Philippi, making it a center of commerce and travel. It was 8 miles from the sea, making it a center for trade and tourism. The surrounding farmland sat on spring-filled fertile ground that made it lush and prosperous.

Philippi was a historic, proud, wealthy, idolatrous, diverse city. The mishmash of old Greek families and new Roman money, transient easterners coming off and on the highway, farmers, and Jews made it a cultural melting pot in a world where no one valued “diversity.”

## BACKGROUND: THE CITY OF PHILIPPI

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Though I can't prove it, I think the Phillippian church is Paul's favorite. Philippians is certainly his most joyful letter. But while Philippi was a beautiful city, it was also at its heart a dog-eat-dog town where the practical outcome of confessing Jesus as Lord could leave you abandoned, unemployed, beaten, imprisoned, or worse.

Paul's new congregation was in a precarious position, as they were utterly dependent upon their trade guilds and their patrons for protection and survival. Nearly all of the predominate leaders were either elite Roman families, military families, or farming families, many of whom served false gods. Your only job opportunities lay with them.

Their founding pastor, Paul himself, had been beaten and thrown in prison for preaching Christ. And, for these new converts, to confess Christ publicly and claim Jesus as Lord meant they risked alienating their patrons, which could end their protection and land them in the same place as Paul.

Confessing Christ could also force them to leave their trade unions because they were connected with idolatrous pagan worship, and that would leave them unemployed.

It is to such a small, beleaguered, embattled group that Paul penned some of his most memorable words:

*I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

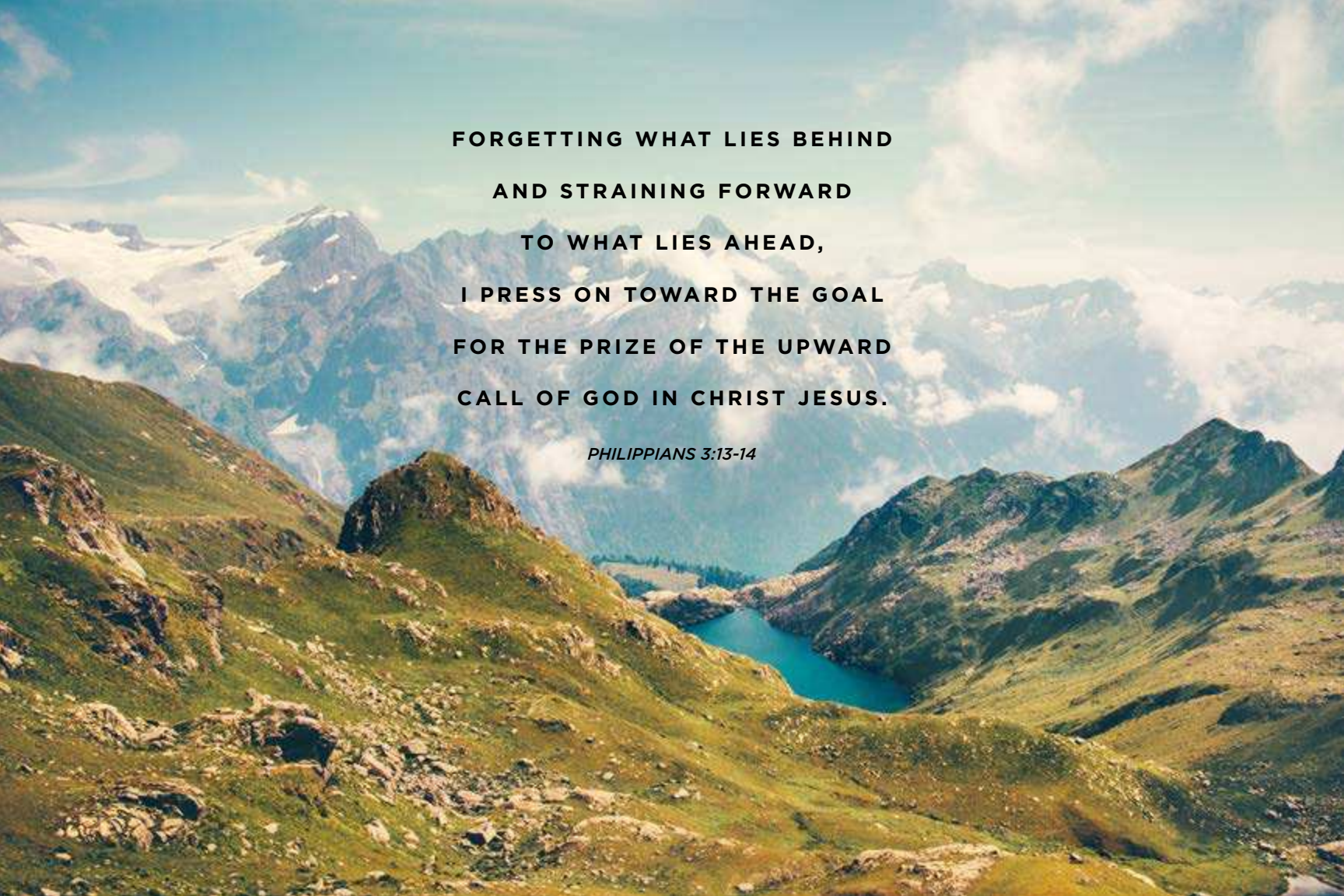
*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

*But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.*

*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

**Dr. Ben Bailie**

*Pastor, Grace Lake Nona*

A scenic mountain landscape with a turquoise lake in the valley and snow-capped peaks in the background. The foreground shows rocky, green slopes leading down to the lake. The sky is blue with light clouds.

**FORGETTING WHAT LIES BEHIND  
AND STRAINING FORWARD  
TO WHAT LIES AHEAD,  
I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL  
FOR THE PRIZE OF THE UPWARD  
CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.**

*PHILIPPIANS 3:13-14*

# THE CHURCH: GOD'S AGENT OF CHANGE

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Our church at Grace is always on the move, but that's nothing new. From the ancient days of our faith, God's primary method to draw people to Himself has been to send groups of people to proclaim the gospel and start new gatherings of believers.

In Acts 13, God directs the church in Antioch to send out missionaries Barnabas and Paul:

*While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:2-3)*

But where should they go?

Knowing we *should* go is the easy part. Knowing where to head is a little bit harder. Paul had already spent quite a bit of time in Asia and seen some great fruit from his first missionary journey. It made sense that they would press further in that direction. Great Roman cities lay ahead for them, teeming with large Jewish

populations — Ephesus, Smyrna and Sardis. Paul's heart for his fellow Jews, combined with cities in bondage to idolatry, presented the perfect challenge for an Apostle with a heart for telling people about Jesus.

But God had other plans.

*And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them (Acts 16:9-10).*

This was clearly not what Paul originally had planned, but God prevented them from going further east. God asked them to go west instead to Macedonia, in modern-day Turkey.

There, in Philippi, Paul would plant a church with three of the most diverse converts ever. He met a poor slave girl who he helped release from a demon's grip.

## THE CHURCH: GOD'S AGENT OF CHANGE

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He met a Roman jailer, a hard man who was about to commit suicide, but Paul brought him to Christ. He met a wealthy aristocratic woman who was religious and searching for God, but who was transformed by meeting Jesus.

Through the Holy Spirit and Paul's obedience, these people were set free from their sins and introduced to the gospel in the most different ways imaginable. They live on today as an eternal example of how Christ brings unity among the most diverse people.

When Christians are faithful to go wherever God chooses to send them, they are guaranteed to have His presence and the fruit God has planned for them. This is what the Bible says about those who are sent:

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns" (Isaiah 52:7).*

As a part of Grace, you are one of those beautiful people. **We plant churches because the story of the Bible is to see the lost saved and the saved sent.** Grace is simply part of that story, as it continues to unfold and proclaim the gospel to the nations of the earth.

As we plant churches together, we need your prayers for our city and our neighborhoods, for families, friends, neighbors and co-workers.

And in addition to prayer, I believe in the coming years we will see many move into missional lives, sacrificing our own agendas, like Paul, for the sake of greater effectiveness for the kingdom.

This means that Grace will send out its best and brightest for the sake of the gospel. We'll see people in the marketplace give up careers to move into full-time leadership in the church. We'll see those in business leverage their opportunities for the sake of gospel and not just the motive of profit. We'll see moms and dads intentionally handing down the gospel to their children. We'll see kids sharing their faith with other kids.

## THE CHURCH: GOD'S AGENT OF CHANGE

We'll also train and support and release some of the best communicators and evangelists in the city. As a church, we'll move toward radical lives of generosity and break the hold of materialism that grips our culture. Our lives will become more about what we can give away than what we can keep.

The good news is that we are already seeing the fruit of many of these steps in our church. We have a long way to go. But every journey starts with a single step.

What is your next step toward Christ in this story?  
There's no more important question.

**Mike Adkins**  
*Senior Pastor*

# THE GOD OF ISRAEL

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To have a good understanding of the whole Bible and the eventual spread of the gospel, we have to understand Genesis 12, 15, and 17. It is in these chapters where we read the call of Abraham, the covenant between Abraham and God, and the sign of that covenant. **Understanding these ancient chapters helps bring the rest of the scriptures to life and gives us understanding into the great struggles of the early Church.**

When the story in Genesis 12 begins, God calls a man from Ur named Abram: *Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great* (Genesis 12:1-2).

This call is frightening and uncertain — a call to leave everything and everyone Abram knows to go to a place God will eventually tell him about sometime in the future. He hasn't even laid out the details of this divine plan.

God is, in essence, saying, "Trust Me."

In chapter 15, we see the call turn into a covenant. Abram is concerned because God promised him that he would be made into a great nation. But here he is later, still old and childless. Abram decided a member of his household would have to become a designated heir to make God's words come true, not a child of his own flesh and blood. But God was not done with His plan.

He tells Abram that He meant what He said: *This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir* (Genesis 15:4). Then God did something remarkable to prove it.

*He brought [Abram] outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness* (Gen 15:5-6).

This is the beginning of God setting a people apart for Himself.

## THE GOD OF ISRAEL

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Can you feel the immensity of this call and this covenant? The God of creation was now speaking to and calling an individual. He was telling him that a great nation would come through his lineage and that God's chosen people would be his descendants. They would be great. They would be countless. And they would be His.

But what would be the sign of this great and precious covenant?

First, God changes Abram's name to Abraham. In the original Hebrew, Abraham literally means "father of a multitude."

Second, God tells him that there will be a sign that will correlate with this covenant. *This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised* (Gen 17:10, ESV). It was the physical marker of a spiritual reality.

These physical descendants of Abraham would be born into a covenant between God and his people. This sign of circumcision became so important to the descendants of Abraham because of what it represented: it was the sign of the covenant — of God's promises to them.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, this covenant is the central story of our history. God begins to raise up for Himself a people through this promise. Abraham would have his son that was promised, Isaac. Isaac would then have a son named Jacob. Jacob's name would be changed to Israel and a nation would be birthed. It would be these children of Israel that would grow into the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, the people of God.

These people would always be marked with the sign of circumcision, as this made them distinct from those nations around them. They were a special and chosen people that had a covenant with the one, true God. He was truly the God of Israel.



## THE GOD OF ISRAEL

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Even if someone who was not born Jewish were to be brought into Israel and he was a male, he had to first be circumcised. Even as they would turn away from God throughout the course of the Old Testament, they retained this practice as a primary distinction that separated them from the other nations, because this sign made them Jewish, and being Jewish made them God's.


They were, in the truest sense of the word, a theocracy: a nation ruled by God. They were marked by this sign of the covenant, and they were ruled by the laws that were given to them by God himself. They were meant to be blessed and to draw in people who wanted to see the One Who blessed them.

This is the defining characteristic of Old Testament faith: it was a “come and see” religion. **Israel was made into a great nation so that people would look on and see the greatness of their God.**

But everything changed when Jesus showed up on the scene.

**Caleb Brasher**

*Pastor, Grace Clermont*



BUT OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN,  
AND FROM IT WE AWAIT A SAVIOR,  
THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

*PHILIPPIANS 3:20*

# THE GOD OF THE NATIONS

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By the time that Jesus came to earth, the nation of Israel had been around for centuries and was well-established in its identity. This sign of the covenant, circumcision, had become a no-exceptions part of who they were. The Jews were the only people of God.

The Jesus, a Jew, comes to us as the promised Messiah. He preaches the gospel message. He lives a perfect life that we could never live and dies in our place, fulfilling the full law of God. Through His death and resurrection, He says that anyone who believes and trusts in Him can now have eternal life and a relationship with their holy Creator.

This is an astonishing shift for the disciples, the first and most passionate Jewish believers. In the Great Commission at the end of Matthew, Jesus tells them to go and make disciples of *all nations* (Matthew 28:19). His message was not meant to stay within the city limits of Jerusalem, it was meant to be taken to the ends of the earth, where whoever believes will have eternal life.

As Jesus ascends into heaven after his resurrection, this one final message is recorded again in Acts 1:8: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

**This message of good news was not meant to be kept, but to be spread.**

If Christ's words weren't enough, the Apostle Peter soon has a strange dream about the many animals that Jewish law forbade the people of Israel to eat (Acts 10). As he looked at these animals, which he had known as unclean his whole life, he heard God say, *Rise, Peter; kill and eat* (Acts 10:13). And then Peter was led by the Holy Spirit to a Gentile (the name for anyone who is not a Jew) named Cornelius. Cornelius has also had a dream about meeting him.

When Peter put all of this together, he knew that God was telling him that hope no longer belonged exclusively to

## THE GOD OF THE NATIONS

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the Jews. *Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him* (Acts 10:34-35). He then shares the gospel with Cornelius, who believes in Christ, receives the Holy Spirit, and is baptized.

It is at this moment that we begin to see the God of Israel becoming God of the whole world. The message of the gospel began to trickle outside of Israel and would soon flood the nations.

This inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God created a huge controversy among the early Church, however, and it all swirled around those first few chapters in Genesis. God had made a covenant with His people through Abraham, and the sign of that covenant was circumcision. He then gave His law to the nation of Israel, and it was to them He promised a Messiah. So, it followed to many, anyone who wanted to believe in Jesus as this promised One needed to become circumcised and adhere to the Jewish law. Others believed, like Peter, that God had signaled in Christ that He wanted to draw all men to Himself.

In Acts 15, we see the early Church leaders struggle with this debate, and a council was called in Jerusalem that would try and answer this question: “Do you have to be Jewish in order to be Christian?”

*Some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’* (Acts 15:1). But through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the leadership of Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James, the council concluded that you did not have to become Jewish in order to become a Christian. The gospel was to be spread without any conditions apart from believing and trusting in Christ.

This swung the door wide open for the spread of the gospel. **The kingdom of God was no longer a “come and see” religion, it was now a “go and tell” religion.** Jesus did not just die for one nation — He died for the world. Anyone, from any tribe and from any nation, who believes in Jesus Christ and trusts in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

## THE GOD OF THE NATIONS

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This message of the New Testament seems very different from the Old. But even in the very beginning, we can see the foreshadowing of this heart of God within call of Abram and nation of Israel.

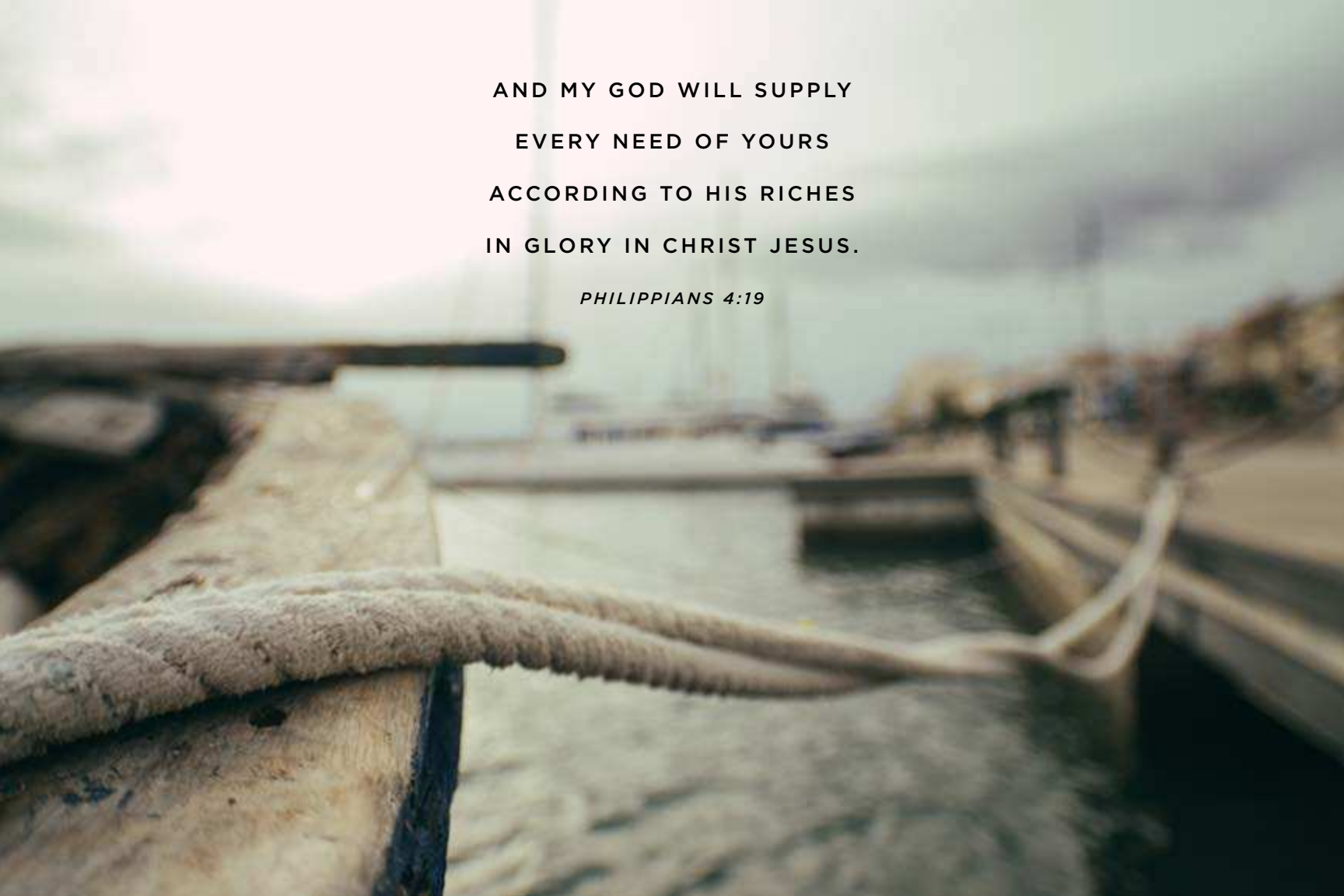
Remember Genesis 12:1-2, when God first called Abram to leave his home and follow God to be made into a great nation? God promised *I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great.*

But what was the desired result of this call and promise? So that in Abram *all the families of the earth will be blessed* (Genesis 12:3). The ultimate purpose of God as He created a people for Himself and His glory was to be a blessing to all the nations.

So when the Jerusalem Council met and decided that the gospel was meant for every nation, and that people did not have to become Jewish to become Christian, they were fulfilling the end of this promise. They flung the door open for the spread of the gospel and laid the foundation for the planting of gospel-centered churches around the world — including this first European church in the city of Philippi.

**Caleb Brasher**

*Pastor, Grace Clermont*



AND MY GOD WILL SUPPLY  
EVERY NEED OF YOURS  
ACCORDING TO HIS RICHES  
IN GLORY IN CHRIST JESUS.

*PHILIPPIANS 4:19*

# YOUR SPIRITUAL ANCESTORS

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In the past few years, two PBS shows have taken the world by storm.

The first is Steven Johnson's show *How We Got to Now*, in which popular scientist Steven Johnson explores the history of great ideas. He walks the audience through the evolution of a variety of topics, down the long and winding road of time to today.

For example, the modern marvel of the "selfie," a high-definition photograph of yourself that can be instantly broadcast all over the globe, can be traced to the printing press.

Mr. Johnson explains that when Mr. Gutenberg invented his printing press in 1440, he sparked a revolution in lens-making, as people now wanted eyeglasses so that they could read more easily. Better lenses led to better telescopes, which revolutionized our knowledge of space, and eventually to better microscopes, which transformed biology.

Along the way, investigations into glass initiated by the lens-makers also led to the discovery of fiberglass and eventually fiber-optic cables. This laid the infrastructure for this crazy thing called the "world-wide-web," as well as advancement in mirrors and cameras, and thus to the phenomenon of the "selfie."

Similarly, he shows how our mass-consumer gigantic box stores are the oversized offspring of the itty-bitsy invention of the laser. For without the invention of the laser there would be no barcode, and if there were no barcode, there would be no Wal-Mart. Sometimes huge transformations begin in the most unlikely places. It is fun to look back, especially since we see much clearer when doing so.

Another show on PBS that looks back is *Finding Your Roots* with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The show traces the family lineage of famous Americans, with the story often taking unsuspecting twists and turns.

## YOUR SPIRITUAL ANCESTORS

For example, the third season was in “production delay” because Ben Affleck did not want it made public that his ancestors were slave owners. Liberal Bill Maher was quite unhappy when he discovered that he and Fox News pundit Bill O’Reilly were related. And civil-rights activist Kara Walker wasn’t thrilled when she discovered slave owners in her genealogy. Not only do huge transformations begin in the most unlikely places, but family histories are made up of the most unlikely people.

In the story of Acts 16 and the church of Philippi we have both: the unlikely beginning to the history-shaping movement that is the unleashing of the gospel onto European soil, and the unlikely characters who make up our family of faith. As John Stott says, “With the benefit of hindsight, knowing that Europe became the first Christian continent and was until fairly recently the main base for missionary outreach to the rest of the world, we can see what an epoch-making development this was.”

You see, if you are reading this article now (and I assume you are), then **the story of the church of Philippi is your story.** These are your ancestors. These are your people.

The Church of Philippi began with a vision, was birthed out of a prayer meeting and Bible study, set the city in an uproar, and caused the founding pastors to be beaten and thrown into prison. And so began the story of the church in Europe. From here, the gospel would slowly move up into the land of the Gauls, then the Franks, then into the wild outer lands of the Celts. It would be solidified in Geneva, and Strasbourg, and Wittenberg, and then established in London and Edinburgh and be launched across the pond into settlements in Jamestown and debtors colonies in Savannah. From there it would permeate all throughout the “New World.” And now, here you are today.

Sometimes huge transformations begin in the most unlikely places, and families are made up of the most unlikely people.

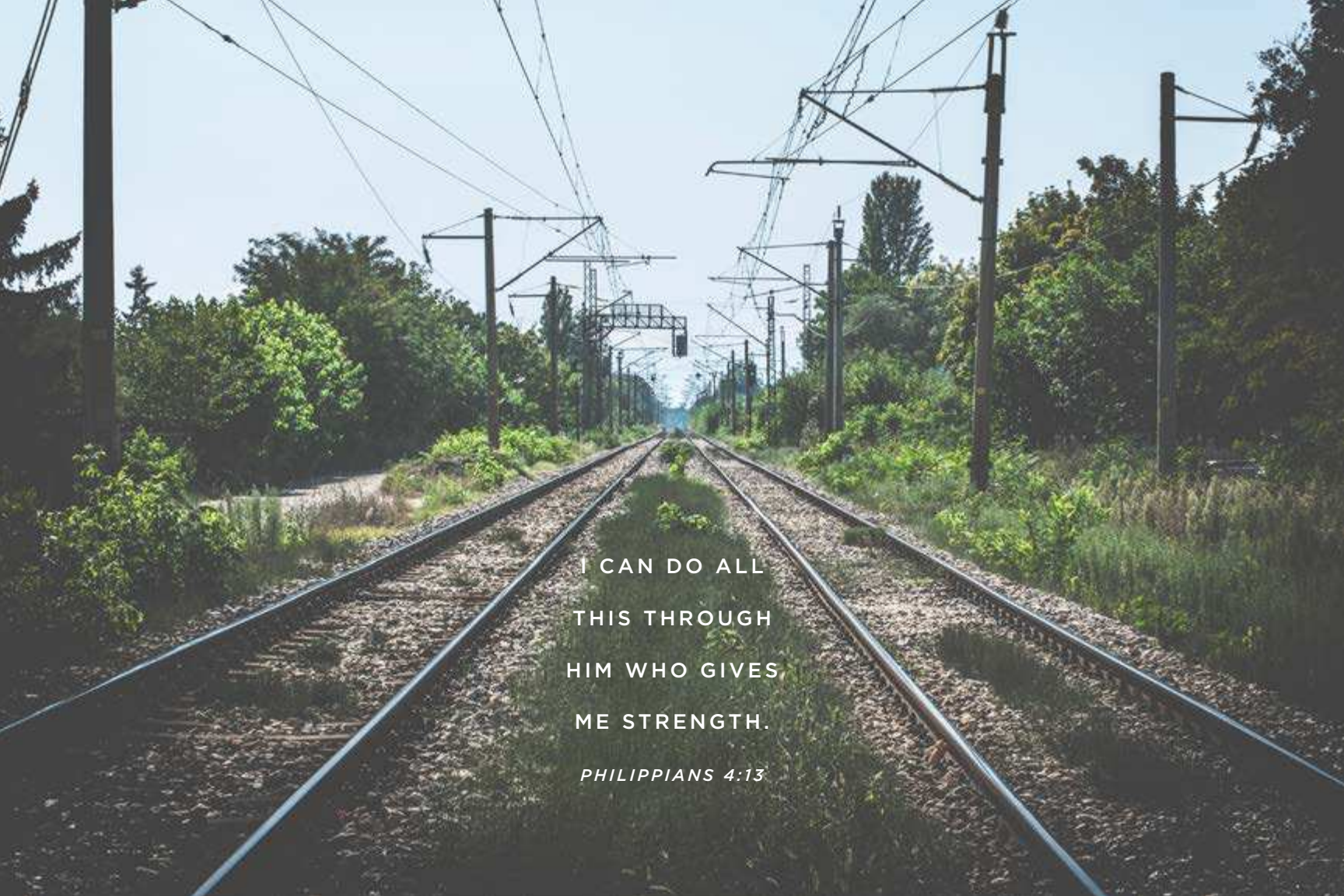


## YOUR SPIRITUAL ANCESTORS

As you read and study Acts 16 with us, remember: this is where the church in Europe all began, which is where the church in America all began. These are our people. This is our story. This is our family.

**Dr. Ben Bailie**

*Pastor, Grace Lake Nona*



I CAN DO ALL  
THIS THROUGH  
HIM WHO GIVES  
ME STRENGTH.

*PHILIPPIANS 4:13*

# CASE STUDIES IN CHANGE

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As we've just learned, the converts that began the church in Philippi are our spiritual family — our ancestors in the faith. Let's learn more about the three unlikely people that God drew to Himself in three unlikely ways.

## LYDIA

Lydia was a business woman from the city of Thyatira in Asia Minor. She was wealthy and dealt with the wealthy as a seller of fine purple cloth. Her hometown was well known for its dyeing guild and its proficiency in the indigo trade.

Scholars are split on whether she was a Greek woman who lived in the Roman settlement of Philippi or a God-fearing Jew who had not yet encountered the good news of Jesus the Messiah. Either way, God was about to meet Lydia right where she was.

Lydia's conversion is a clear picture of how God orchestrates the circumstances of our lives. After Paul's first missionary journey, he is redirected by God to leave Asia and head westward toward Europe. Lydia is

considered by scholars to be the first European convert to Christ: *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul (Acts 16:13-14).*

Lydia's conversion required Paul to leave Asia and meet her in Europe. The crazy part? Lydia's hometown of Thyatira was in the region Paul had originally intended to visit in Asia Minor when God sent him west instead. Had Paul been disobedient and pressed on into Asia, he would have missed this most important resident.

The scripture also says that *The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.* So God was orchestrating not only the messenger to bring the gospel, but also the hearer. God opened Lydia's heart to respond to the gospel's message. **It's amazing that God leaves nothing in our transformation to chance.**

## CASE STUDIES IN CHANGE

Lydia is transformed by reasoned preaching and teaching of the gospel. She immediately wants to become a part of what God is doing in reaching others. She is baptized and offers a home for Paul and his companions to lodge on their missionary journey: *And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay."* And she prevailed upon us (Acts 16:15).

The gospel came to Lydia in the middle of her ordinary life. There was no tragedy or trauma, no big drama. She wasn't desperate or lost. She was religious, but her heart had not yet been fully changed by Jesus.

The gospel comes to us all in different ways. Some of us come through trials and hardships — lives filled with pain that cause us to look for something else. Others come to Christ in a quiet and ordinary awakening to the truth. No particular way is the right way. But Jesus is the right destination.

**Mike Adkins**  
*Senior Pastor*

## THE SLAVE GIRL

The gospel goes deeper than our outward circumstance; it changes our inward condition.

In Acts 16:16-18, we find Paul, Silas, Luke, & Timothy are traveling again to the place of prayer in Philippi. They had just met the respected businesswoman, Lydia, and saw how the good news of Jesus changed her life. But now they encounter a young girl, and not the kind that sold Girl Scout Cookies. This girl was demon-possessed and had the ability to tell fortunes. She was also a slave to her owners, who exploited her demonic powers for personal profit.

When Paul, Silas, Luke, & Timothy travel through the city, the young slave girl notices them, begins following them, and starts yelling out behind them: "These men are servants of the most high God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." First, she had never met these men, so this is only something the demonic spirit inside of her would have known about them. Second, this passage says she did this for many days.

## CASE STUDIES IN CHANGE

As you would suspect, the text says Paul became annoyed. The word for “annoyed” in Greek is actually *diaponetheis*, which means “to be grieved.”

This is a critical word to know in order to understand Paul’s heart for this young slave girl. He was not simply annoyed because she was constantly shouting this phrase. He was deeply grieved for the spiritual condition of this young girl. And in his grief, after multiple days, Paul turned to her and said, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And the demonic spirit left her that very hour. In that moment she was changed by dramatically the power of the Spirit and the gospel.

Paul had a burden for this young slave girl, as should we, because her condition was our condition before we knew Christ. He saw that this girl was doubly bound. Not only was she a slave to her earthly masters, but she was slave to sin and evil in her heart.

Far too often we miss the spiritual condition of people we know. We live in a culture that looks primarily to the

outward circumstance to determine the condition of a person’s life. Western society is routinely aware of outward slaveries, but is often blind to inward captivities in the soul.

We want to help those that are outwardly oppressed and held captive to poverty. We want to liberate those that are victims of sex-trafficking. We want to free those that are held captive to abusive relationships. We want to set people free from their disease. And those are all noble things we should aspire to do.

However, they fail to fully grieve for the true condition of a person, because **outward circumstances pale in comparison to the eternal oppression of sin in our hearts if we do not have Christ.**

Early in Jesus’ ministry, he went to his hometown synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath, and He read from the scroll of Isaiah. He did this before the Scribes and Pharisees, the teachers of the Jewish law. In doing so, he was proclaiming what He had come to do on the earth.

## CASE STUDIES IN CHANGE

This is what He read: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and give sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed* (Luke 4:18).

When Jesus read this, He was not talking about freeing us from physical slavery, but freeing us from spiritual bondage. After all, if we are captives spiritually, what good is it if we are free physically? Outward circumstances are temporary, but the condition of our souls is eternal.

This encounter with the slave girl reminds us that the gospel is not of this world. It goes deeper than the circumstances of our life, all the way to the condition of a soul. Regardless of who you are, what you are, where you are, or what you have done, the good news of Jesus can redeem you from any spiritual bondage.

### Brian Allen

*Pastor, Grace Winter Garden*

## THE JAILER

Paul's letter to the Philippian church is one of encouragement, reminding them of the gospel that brought them together, gave them spiritual life, and unified them as one with each other. Paul is calling them to remember where they've come from, where they've been, and what they could achieve as one body.

In all honesty, it was a peculiar church plant from the beginning. The church was founded with a wealthy business woman, a fortune-telling slave girl, and a duty-bound jailer.

**All three were so different, yet all were rescued from their sin through Christ.**

The Philippian jailer had a remarkable experience with Paul and Silas as they were traveling through Macedonia. Numerous scholars believe that this man was an old Roman soldier who settled down in Philippi, a major Roman city where veterans sought retirement. Given the historic demographics, it makes sense — although the text does not specify — that the jailer was an ex-soldier.

## CASE STUDIES IN CHANGE

The position of jailer was fitting for a veteran; a fit soldier would be the first choice of Roman officials. Who else would be more qualified than a man who had been trained to fight and kill on behalf of the Roman Empire? Either way, it soon became apparent that this man was dedicated to his job at all costs.

How much of the commotion had the jailer heard? Paul and Silas were certainly causing an uproar. When he entered the scene, the missionaries had been accused of disturbing the city by advocating customs that were not lawful for Romans (Acts 16:20-21). This was a false accusation that riled up the crowd, who attacked them furiously. So much so, the magistrates tore Paul and Silas' clothes off and "beat them with rods" (Acts 16:22).

After a severe beating, they were handed over to the jailer's custody, who interpreted his instructions strictly, fastening their legs in stocks at the center of the prison. This was not a comfortable position for Paul and Silas, as one could imagine. The stocks had more than two holes

for the legs, a design meant to force the prisoners' legs apart and cause an extreme amount of pain. It was not the jailer's business to give any consideration for the prisoners' comfort, but to make sure they did not escape (Bruce 315).

The jailer most likely thought nothing of the whole ordeal. He threw these two men in prison as his duty and went on with his evening. What he did not know was that Paul and Silas would begin praying and singing well into the night, ministering to each other and any prisoners within earshot. While praising God in the midst of a dingy prison, there was a violent earthquake, strong enough to shake the foundations of the jail, open the doors, and shake loose the stocks, freeing all the prisoners. Although Greece and Macedonia were regions known for earthquakes, this particular one was of divine origin (Witherington 497).

The earthquake that rocked the prison foundations woke up the jailer, who immediately went to check the state of the prison and – of most importance – the prisoners. The worst had to be running through his mind: the prison doors were open; the prisoners, of course, had seized their opportunity and escaped.

## CASE STUDIES IN CHANGE

What was the jailer's next move? F.F. Bruce describes the scene well: "For a man brought up to a Roman soldier's ideals of duty and discipline, only one honorable course was open — suicide" (Bruce 317). If this seems surprising, it shouldn't. The jailer was responsible for the safekeeping of his inmates, and rather than suffer the public shame and humiliation of being beaten — or even executed — for dereliction of duty, he chose what he saw as his only way out in an honor and shame-based culture.

What happened next, however, changed the jailer and his family's lives forever. As he was about to drive a sword into his body, intent on ending his life, Paul called out from the dark with a loud voice, *Do not harm yourself, for we are all here* (Acts 16:28). One can only imagine the feeling of relief and shock that simultaneously filled his thoughts and heart. Seeing this as nothing less than a miracle, or at least a divine sign, he called for lights and ran in and fell down at Paul and Silas's feet, trembling (Witherington 498). That divinely ordained earthquake and Paul's voice from the prison brought a proud, rugged, tough Roman

soldier to his knees. **God knew that it was going to take an earthquake and confrontation with death to bring the Philippian jailer to a saving knowledge of Christ.**

Then, the jailer asked the most important question of his life: *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* (Acts 16:30). It was possible that he meant no more than how he could be rescued from the coming judgment signalled by the earthquake (Witherington 498). Whatever he meant, Paul and Silas seized the opportunity to share the gospel. They boldly proclaimed, *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household* (Acts 16:31).

God's amazing grace had shone on this man and his family. The jailer washed their wounds and *he was baptized at once, he and his family* (Acts 16:33). The same gospel that blessed Lydia and the slave girl now brought this old Roman soldier into the family of God. He would — indeed — never be the same.

**Bobby Raulerson**

*Pastor, Grace Oviedo*



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A photograph of a green van driving away on a narrow dirt road through a dense forest of tall evergreen trees. The van is seen from the back, with a person visible on the roof rack. The scene is filled with lush green foliage and sunlight filtering through the canopy.

**WEEKLY MESSAGE NOTES  
& QUESTIONS**

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WEEK 1: SEPTEMBER 11TH  
*THE GOSPEL PATH TO TRANSFORMATION*  
*ACTS 16:1-13*

Message Notes:

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WEEK 1: *THE GOSPEL PATH  
TO TRANSFORMATION*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION  
AND DISCUSSION

Describe a time in which you struggled to find God’s will in your life. How does this story of Paul help you view your own struggles in finding God’s will?

Do you see yourself as someone planted here by God, or as someone who just happens to be here? In what ways have you seen God’s hand at work in placing you in this city?

Philippi is a town with so few Jewish people there was no synagogue to be found. Have you ever felt like God has called you to be a light surrounded by darkness?

Who has God placed in your life that needs the gospel? What are some steps you can take this month to share the gospel with them?

Spend some time in your Grace Community praying for these people and the city of Orlando.

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WEEK 2: SEPTEMBER 18TH  
*CHANGED BY TRUTH*  
*ACTS 16:14-15*

Message Notes:

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WEEK 2: *CHANGED BY TRUTH*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION  
AND DISCUSSION

Why do you think God put Lydia in her profession before Paul shared the gospel with her? Do you think God is using you in a similar fashion?

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What does it mean for the Lord to “open” Lydia’s heart?

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Paul is a bold man who often would preach in front of men who sought to cause him harm. Do you think he presented the gospel the same way with these women by the river? What can we learn from this?

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Lydia was a religious person before meeting Paul, but not a believer in Jesus. We all know people who are morally good, but not believers. Who are the Lydias in your life that need you to share the gospel with them?

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What gifts or circumstances has God placed in your life that could be used to spread the gospel in Orlando?

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WEEK 3: SEPTEMBER 25TH  
*CHANGED BY POWER*  
*ACTS 16:16-21*

Message Notes:

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WEEK 3: *CHANGED BY POWER*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION  
AND DISCUSSION

Have you ever experienced something miraculous?  
Something that made God's existence clear to you?

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Why was Paul greatly annoyed with the demon  
possessed girl? Wasn't she helping to advertise his  
ministry?

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The slave girl's life was radically changed through the  
power of Christ. She was set free from something that  
held her captive. How have you seen your life changed  
after you were confronted by the gospel?

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How does the slave girl's encounter with the gospel  
compare and contrast with Lydia's experience?

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After casting out a demon in public, how does the town  
respond? Is this how you would expect them to react?

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WEEK 4: OCTOBER 2ND  
*CHANGED BY SUFFERING*  
*ACTS 16:22-40*

Message Notes:

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WEEK 4:  
*CHANGED BY SUFFERING*

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION  
AND DISCUSSION

Paul and Silas are beaten, thrown into the worst parts of the jail, and put in stocks at the ankles. How do they respond?

Share a story about a time when you saw a Christian suffer in a way that displayed their trust in God?

As the jailer encountered men who were changed by the gospel, he knew there must be something to their faith. Would you say your life reflects the faith you claim? What would need to change in you for that to be the case?

Paul and Silas could have easily escaped, but at the cost of the jailer's life. In what way is God asking you to withhold escaping your 'jail' for the sake of another?

In week one you prayed for people placed in your life that need the gospel. How have you been challenged over the rest of this series to share the gospel with them?

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# ABOUT GRACE

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Grace is one large church in many smaller communities, with a mission to help people take their next step toward Christ.

Our local, neighborhood campuses worship in Orlando, Oviedo, Winter Garden, Clermont, Lake Nona, and at Edgewood Children's Ranch. Each of our campuses shares a central vision and organizational structure under the leadership of Senior Pastor Mike Adkins, but each campus also has its own pastor-teacher and leadership team. We believe this is the best way we can keep church feeling like family and also reach the vastly diverse neighborhoods of Central Florida.

Our teaching pastors and our worship pastors work together week by week, bringing many voices into unity to plan our ministry and our worship services. They take common scriptures and ideas for each weekend and bring them to life around songs, challenges and themes that reach our unique communities.

Our teaching and worship pastors also trade campuses every so often, too, allowing our people to hear from a plurality of elders and keeping Grace from being built up around one central person.

## WHAT WE'RE ABOUT

Expository, gospel-centered teaching, both in Sunday worship and in regular classes and workshops.

Modern worship woven with liturgy and creedal confession, focusing on the work of Christ and not ourselves.

Corporate communion, personal confession and prayer every week.

Spiritual friendship and connection through sacrificial service and Grace Communities.

Gospel-focused family ministry that centers around what God has done for your kids through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Celebration of ancient seasons like Advent and Lent to prepare for holy days.

## CAMPUS LOCATIONS

### GRACE ORLANDO

Meets at Edgewater High School  
3100 Edgewater Drive, Orlando  
Services Sundays at 9:15 & 10:45a  
Senior Pastor Mike Adkins

### GRACE OVIEDO

Meets at Indian Trails Middle School  
415 Tuskawilla Road, Winter Springs  
Services Sundays at 9:15 & 10:45a  
Pastor Bobby Raulerson

### GRACE WINTER GARDEN

Meets at Whispering Oak Elementary  
15300 Stoneybrook W Winter Garden  
Services Sundays at 10a  
Pastor Brian Allen

### GRACE CLERMONT

Meets at South Lake Presbyterian Church  
131 Chesnut Street, Clermont  
Service Sundays at 5:45p  
Pastor Caleb Brasher

### GRACE LAKE NONA

Meets at Eagle Creek Elementary  
10025 Eagle Creek Sanctuary Blvd, Orlando  
Service Sundays at 5p  
Pastor Dr. Ben Bailie

### GRACE EDGEWOOD

Serves Edgewood Children's Ranch  
1451 Edgewood Ranch Road, Orlando  
Service Sundays at 3p



[discovergrace.com](http://discovergrace.com)