

Devotional 6

The Partnership That Cannot Be Separated

Daily Renewal Is Neither All God Nor All You — It Is the Paradox of Both

The Awakening

The two most common errors in the Christian life pull in exactly opposite directions — and both are ways of escaping the same productive tension. The first error is moralism: you saved yourself by deciding, and now you must sustain yourself by performing. God is the distant validator of your spiritual résumé. The second error is passivity: God does everything, so your effort is either unnecessary or, worse, a kind of unbelief. Let go and let God.

Philippians 2:12–13 refuses both escapes. Paul holds two things together with a conjunction that should keep every Christian in constant theological discomfort: work out your salvation — real effort, genuine striving, active obedience. For it is God who works in you — not as an afterthought but as the causal ground of the effort itself. You are working. God is working. And the reason you are working is that God is working. These are not competing claims. They are the anatomy of genuine renewal.

PHILIPPIANS 2:12–13 — FOUNDATIONAL TEXT

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

What the Text Reveals

Work Out, Not Work For

The Greek *katergazesthe* — 'work out' — is not 'work for.' Paul does not say work to earn your salvation or work to secure your salvation. He says work out what is already in you. The imagery is of a mine: the gold is already there. The work is the extraction and expression of what God has deposited. Daily renewal is the active, effortful process of drawing out into lived reality what the Spirit has already placed within.

Fear and Trembling: Holy Seriousness About the Stakes

'With fear and trembling' — not anxiety about losing salvation, but the holy seriousness of someone who understands the weight of what they are working with. The opposite of fear and trembling is not peace — it is carelessness. The person who approaches daily renewal casually has not understood what is at stake. The person who approaches it with holy gravity is the one in whom the work will most fully occur.

For It Is God Who Works: The Causal Ground

Energon — 'works' — is the root of our word 'energy.' God is not observing your effort and scoring it. He is the energy source that makes the effort possible. The *for* (*gar*) is causal: the reason you can and should work is that God is energizing the work from within. Your will to obey is itself the product of God's working in you. This is not determinism that eliminates responsibility. It is grace that grounds responsibility in something more reliable than your own resolve.

The Biblical Architecture

The paradox of divine initiative and human response runs through the entire biblical narrative as its structural backbone. Joseph's story — 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good' (Genesis 50:20) — holds human agency and divine sovereignty in the same sentence without collapsing either. The brothers acted. God governed. Neither cancels the other.

Galatians 2:20 is perhaps the most compressed expression of the paradox in the New Testament: 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God.' Three clauses, three paradoxes: I have died / I still live; I no longer live / Christ lives in me; it is my life / I live it by faith. The two sides of Philippians 2:12–13 are embedded in every sentence.

Ephesians 2:10 supplies the teleological grounding: 'We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.' The works are real. They are yours to do. And they were prepared in advance by God before you did them. The tension between divine preparation and human action is not a theological problem to resolve — it is the shape of the redeemed life, sustained by daily renewal.

CORE THESIS

Daily renewal is neither passive surrender nor independent striving — it is the productive tension of genuine human effort energized by divine working. You work because God is working. God's energy makes your effort possible. Separating the two collapses into either exhausted moralism or self-deceived passivity — and both miss the life Scripture describes.

THE QUESTION THAT MATTERS MOST

Which error is more natural to you: trying harder in your own strength, or waiting for God to do what He has called you to actively pursue? How would daily renewal look different if you held both sides of Philippians 2:12–13 simultaneously — working hard, because God is working powerfully within you?

A PRAYER FROM THE AWAKENING

Father, we confess that we have pulled apart what You held together. We have worked in our own strength until we were exhausted and then accused You of absence. Or we have waited for You to act on what You have called us to actively pursue.

The paradox is uncomfortable. We want it to be one thing or the other. But You have written both truths into the same verse — work out, because God is working in.

****Teach us the discipline of active dependence: real effort, fully supplied by Your energy; genuine striving, fully grounded in Your working. Let us neither strive alone nor rest lazily — but work out what You are working in.****

For Your good purpose. That is enough reason to begin. Amen.

Scripture Treasury

CATEGORY	REFERENCE	SCRIPTURE
The Productive Tension	Philippians 2:12–13	<i>Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act.</i>
	Galatians 2:20	<i>I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God.</i>
God's Preparation, Our Action	Ephesians 2:10	<i>We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.</i>
	1 Corinthians 15:10	<i>By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them — yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.</i>
Active Pursuit	Hebrews 12:14	<i>Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.</i>
	2 Peter 1:5–7	<i>Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control...</i>
Grounded in Grace	Romans 6:4	<i>We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that... we too may live a new life.</i>
	Titus 2:11–12	<i>The grace of God... teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.</i>