



# PHILIPPIANS SERIES

## JESUS FIRST

SEVEN PRACTICES TO PUT YOUR  
LIFE BACK IN ORDER

AN 8-DAY DEVOTIONAL FOR HILLSONG UK



## PLAN OVERVIEW

In a world pulling us in every direction, Paul's ancient letter to the Philippian church offers a practical blueprint for a reordered life – one where Jesus is joyfully elevated to first place, in everything.

This 8-day devotional is part of our wider teaching series across Hillsong UK, diving deep into Philippians to mine its rich and relevant wisdom for putting our scattered lives back in holy order.

Each day unpacks a practice drawn from Paul's words – a habit of the heart that resets our priorities and reshapes our everyday rhythms, inviting Jesus from the fringes of our life to be foremost once again. If you've ever longed for a faith that feels grounded, focused, and alive in a distracted age, this journey of quiet renewal and practical re-formation is for you.

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### DAY 1: INTRODUCTION TO PHILIPPIANS

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2

NIV

*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

The year is A.D. 60. Paul is under arrest in a Roman governor's quarters — likely the praetorium in Caesarea. His freedom has vanished, his future is uncertain, and his Kingdom mission looks like it's been put on hold. The conditions are bleak, too: poor food, dim light, and rough treatment. If ever there were a time to spiral into complaining and self-pity, this would be it.

But instead, Paul writes an extraordinary letter to his friends in Philippi — one overflowing with joy, purpose, and unshakable spiritual clarity. No bitterness. No panic. No self-protection. Just **Jesus first**: front and centre, exalted amid the chaos.

Even the opening greeting, today's passage, overflows with faith: "Grace and peace to you" (verse 2). Far more than a pleasantries, this is a declaration flowing from deep, hopeful conviction. Paul's body may be chained, but his inner life is radiant and free. Why? Because Jesus wasn't part of his life — Jesus was his life.

This is why the book of Philippians still speaks with such power today. Rather than being some dusty, outdated, lofty-theological text, it's a gritty, vibrant, street-level letter for real people navigating real pressure: burnout, disappointment, restraint, distraction, uncertainty. It's for anyone longing to put Jesus first — not in theory, but in practice. Not just in part, but in every part.

Spiritual formation, you see, isn't an abstract concept. It happens in real time, in real life, through our rhythms and habits — through thousands of small decisions that gradually rewire what we love, how we live, and who we trust. In that way, Philippians is more than an interesting, ancient text — it's a roadmap to a "**Jesus first**" life.

Over the coming days, we'll explore seven life-giving practices embedded in this short letter:

The practice of **progress**.  
The practice of **perspective**.  
The practice of **humility**.  
The practice of **letting go**.  
The practice of **pressing on**.  
The practice of **peace**.  
The practice of **contentment**.

Each practice is a step toward a reordered life — a life where Jesus is no longer at the fringes but made **foremost, forever**. A life of depth, resilience, and holy ambition. This journey won't start with perfection, but with progress. Not striving, but surrender. One small practice at a time.

**Practice Prompt:** Put your Bible or journal somewhere visible tonight — your bedside, your desk, even the kitchen bench. Let it become a cue for this journey: a reminder that over these next days, you're building new spiritual rhythms.

**Prayer:** Jesus, I want you to be more than part of my life. I want you to be my life: first and foremost in my heart, forever. As I begin this journey through Philippians, reorder what's out of place. Unclutter my inner world. Draw me close. And teach me, through your holy Word, to put you first — one practice at a time. Amen.

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### DAY 2: THE PRACTICE OF PROGRESS

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6

NIV

*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, 6 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.*

Many of us long to put Jesus first in every area of life. But if we're honest, there's often a gap — between the Christ-centred person we *want* to be and who we *actually are*. Over time, that gap can feel like a 'done deal': too wide to make up the difference. So we shrink back, not because we don't care, but because we quietly believe we'll never measure up.

In a culture addicted to flawless performance, this makes sense. We're taught to curate our image, hide our flaws, and give up if we can't keep up. But pretending to be perfect while knowing we're not is exhausting! It damages our joy, kills our motivation, and — worst of all — disfigures our relationship with God.

Into that pressure, Paul speaks a liberating truth: *God isn't demanding your perfection, but He is committed to your progress.* And the best part? It's not on you to finish what He started. You can proudly and freely be a 'work in progress'.

Putting Jesus first doesn't begin with striving. It begins with surrender. It's not powered by willpower or spiritual life-hacks, but by God's grace and faithfulness. As Tim Keller says: *"The Christian life is not about trying harder, but trusting deeper."*

In today's passage, Paul reminds the Philippians of God's part in the process: *Jesus began this. Jesus is sustaining this. Jesus will complete this.* It's pretty reassuring! His effort, not yours, is the anchor. Progress, not perfection, is the goal.

If you want to put Jesus first in your real, everyday life, you must stop trying to be your own saviour, project manager,

or measuring stick. Rather, let His grace set the pace. Then follow, obediently and wholeheartedly, step-by-step. Commit to the *practice of progress*.

The practice of progress means choosing formation over performance, integrity over image, direction over speed, and tiny repetitions over big resolutions. It's returning to Jesus again and again — prioritising His presence over the world's pressure and allowing Him to reform and transform you one moment at a time.

Today, you are not the finished product, and that's okay. Don't let that truth create distance between you and God. Let it draw you nearer. Wherever you're starting from — dry, doubtful, distracted, or devoted — begin there. And keep going. Dwell on Paul's beautiful promise until it sinks deep: *"He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"* (verse 6). Don't give up!

**Practice Prompt:** In your journal or notes app, start a *"progress over perfection"* list. Each evening, ask: **How did I move toward Jesus today — even in a small way?** Maybe you paused to pray before reacting. Maybe you chose compassion over criticism. Maybe you opened the Bible instead of Instagram. Celebrate the small wins. These micro-movements matter — they are forming you into the likeness of Christ.

**Prayer:** Jesus, you're not asking for my perfection. You're asking for my trust. Today, help me to pursue progress in whatever small ways I can. You have begun a good work in me. Now, keep shaping me. Keep renewing me. Keep transforming me until the work is done. Amen.

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### DAY 3: THE PRACTICE OF PERSPECTIVE

PHILIPPIANS 1:21-24

NIV

*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.*

Like the lenses in a pair of prescription glasses, your perspective subtly but powerfully shapes how you see everything. Get the lens wrong, and the world becomes blurry, distorted, and disorienting. But get it right, and suddenly everything sharpens into beautiful focus.

The same is true in life and faith. If your perspective is shaped by fear, pressure, comparison, or the relentless pursuit of success, you'll live exhausted and overwhelmed — always reacting, rarely at peace. But when your life is filtered through the lens of Jesus first, *everything* begins to come into high-definition clarity. Meaning rises to the surface. Priorities realign. Joy grows deep roots.

Paul understood this. As he wrote to the Philippians, he was under house arrest, chained to a guard, unsure of his future. He could have seen his circumstances through the lens of injustice, disappointment, or fear. But instead, he utters one of the most perspective-shifting statements ever written: *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."* (verse 21)

Paul's perspective wasn't shaped by his surroundings but by the depth of his surrender. For him, life wasn't about personal comfort or reputation — it was about Christ. Jesus wasn't part of his life's equation. He was the whole framework.

This kind of clarity doesn't come by accident. It comes by practice: the daily habit of looking at your whole life through the lens of Jesus' lordship. It's about asking: *What does it mean to live for Christ here, now — in my mindset, my calendar, my finances, my work, my relationships, even my rest?*

When "living is Christ" becomes your lens, everything else either falls into place — or fades away. As Oswald Chambers wrote: *"A vision of Christ in all things puts all things in their place."*

A Jesus-first perspective won't always change your circumstances. But it will always change your experience of them. It will anchor you in a world constantly trying to shake you.

But you must choose it. Practice it. Every day. So ask yourself: what would truly change if I lived today with this lens — *"to live is Christ"*?

**Practice Prompt:** Take inventory. What's fighting for first place in your life right now — in your work, your relationships, your mind, and your schedule? Choose one area and ask: What would it look like to live for Christ here today? How could I shift my perspective on this? Then take one small action to put Jesus first.

**Prayer:** Jesus, be my lens today. When fear clouds my thinking or pressure distorts my priorities, refocus my heart on you. Help me to see every part of my life through the perspective of your presence and purposes. Teach me to say with honesty and joy: *"To live is Christ and to die is gain"*. And may that truth shape everything. Amen.

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### DAY 4: THE PRACTICE OF HUMILITY

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-8

NIV

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!*

Putting Jesus first isn't only about admiring Him. It's also about allowing yourself to be confronted by Him and formed into His likeness. One of the clearest – and most countercultural – ways we do this is through the practice of humility.

In a world obsessed with platform, pride, and personal success, humility feels upside-down. But it's the very posture that places Jesus – not ourselves – at the centre of our lives.

That's what Paul calls us to in today's extraordinary passage. *"Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus,"* the apostle pleads (verse 5). And what was that mindset? Humility. Though He was God, Jesus didn't cling to status. He *"made himself nothing"* (verse 7), becoming a servant, choosing the lowest place – even to the point of crucifixion. *This* is the deep humility of heaven: self-emptying love. And it's the only way to live a truly **"Jesus first"** life.

Pride, by contrast, is subtle and shape-shifting. It shows up in comparison, control, defensiveness, unforgiveness, even shame. At its core, pride puts self above God. And when we elevate ourselves, we edge Him out. C.S. Lewis said it like this: *"As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and...as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."*

That's why Scripture doesn't just suggest *humility* – it commands it: *"Clothe yourselves with humility... for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"* (1 Peter 5:5–6). The message is clear: Grace rushes in where pride steps out.

So how do we practise humility?

We start by recognising pride's grip – and asking the Holy Spirit to reveal where it's hiding. Then we make deliberate choices to go low: we pray before reacting. We welcome correction without self-defence. We choose to celebrate

others instead of comparing. We serve without seeking credit. We bite our tongue when we think we're right. We keep learning, listening, and asking for help. We release grudges. We thank God daily. And most of all, we keep putting Jesus – His voice, His way, His kingdom – above our ego, one decision at a time.

Pause and reflect. Which of those thoughts resonated with you? Why not start there?

Humility doesn't mean thinking less of yourself. It means thinking of yourself less – because you're increasingly captivated by Jesus. It's one of the most powerful ways to put Him first. Because when you go low, God lifts you up – and Jesus takes His rightful place.

**Practice prompt:** Today, choose one small act of humility. It could be asking for help, letting someone else speak first, admitting a mistake, forgiving someone, or praying before you react. Write down what you chose and how it felt. Then ask: Did this act make more room for Jesus to be first in my heart today?

**Prayer - excerpts from Bishop Rafael Merry del Val's stunning "litany of humility", written in the early 19th century:**

*O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, hear me.  
From the desire of being loved: Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the desire of being honoured: Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the desire of being praised: Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the desire of being preferred to others: Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the desire of being consulted: Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the desire of being approved: Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the fear of being humiliated: Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the fear of being despised: Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the fear of being forgotten: Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the fear of being ridiculed: Deliver me, Jesus.  
From the fear of being wronged: Deliver me, Jesus.  
Amen.*

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### DAY 5: THE PRACTICE OF LETTING GO

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9

NIV

*But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.*

Let's get philosophical and talk about "gains" and "losses" in life. Not in a financial sense, but in the deep, soul-defining sense of what we count as valuable. "Gains" and "losses", you see, are not fixed ideas. They shift as our seasons change, our faith matures and our priorities evolve. What felt like a gain in one chapter of your life might look like a loss in another.

Think of it like this: imagine being offered more hours at work. If you're in financial need, it's a gain. But if you're already burnt out and your family is longing for time with you, it's a loss. Same event, different perspective.

Jesus Himself explores this dynamic. In Matthew 16:26, He issues one of His most confronting challenges: "*What good will it be for someone to **gain** the whole world, yet **forfeit** their soul?*" It's an unsettling question: one that brings our own definitions of "gains" and "losses" into sharp focus. What are we chasing? What are we calling "gain" that may, in fact, be costing us everything?

Paul picks up the same accounting imagery in today's passage. He lists his impressive résumé – his status, achievements, and religious pedigree – and declares them loss, even garbage, compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. His whole value system has been flipped, his profit and loss columns upended. Why? Because the things that once built his identity now distract from the only identity that truly matters: being found in Jesus.

Letting go, then, isn't just a poetic metaphor – it's a daily discipleship practice. You can't put Jesus first without putting other things second. And sometimes, that even means releasing 'good' things that have become 'ultimate' things – or idols.

So how do we practise letting go?

We pause and ask: *What am I clinging to for security, identity, or validation? Is it leading me closer to Jesus, or quietly replacing Him?*

Then, with humility and courage, we open our hands. We ask the Holy Spirit to reorder our desires. We delete the app, end the toxic pursuit, and say the hard no. We trade counterfeit gains for eternal ones. For, as Augustine once prayed: "*He who has God has everything; he who has everything but God has nothing.*"

**Practice Prompt:** Take an honest inventory of your week. What have you spent your energy pursuing? What has been consuming your headspace? Now ask: *Are these things helping me know Jesus more or less?* Choose one thing to release today, in order to make more space for Him.

**Prayer:** Jesus, I make the same declaration before you today as Paul did all those years ago: "*whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for your sake*". Help me to reorder my life so that you are first, in everything. Amen.

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### DAY 6: THE PRACTICE OF PRESSING ON

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14

NIV

*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

Whether you hike mountains, run businesses, create content, write essays or train for sports, you'll be familiar with this feeling: the desire to quit. How do I know this? Because that's real life. Anything worth doing is laced with discouraging setbacks, fatigue, and resistance. It's part of the process. How we *react* to these inevitable moments, though, is what makes the difference. Do we give up when the thrill fades – or press on?

If we stopped every time the road got hard, no symphony would be finished, no summit reached, and no legacy built. Why? Because anything worthwhile demands perseverance.

Yet perseverance is fading in our culture. We chase quick wins, skip the hard parts, and pivot the moment things get uncomfortable. AI can write the essay. Dinner's ready in 90 seconds. We swipe away relationships and walk out of jobs when conflict comes. Sometimes, walking out or starting over is wise. But often, the easy way simply keeps us from going deep. Staying power is where real formation happens.

The same is true in our walk with Christ. If we expect smooth sailing, we've misunderstood the call. Jesus doesn't pull us out of the brokenness – He sends us headlong into it, to bring His light into the darkest places. This means we will face suffering, wrestle with sin, and see injustice close up. Paul knew this terrain well. And what did he say? Not "*turn back*", but "*press on*". **Put Jesus first**, more than you ever have: "*Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*" (verses 13-14).

To press on is to pray again when your spirit feels dry. It's to ask for help, instead of running away. It's to keep choosing holiness when the world around you has stopped caring. One step at a time.

Because when Jesus is first, everything else finds its place. The past loses its grip. Distractions fade. The finish line comes into focus.

Eugene Peterson called this kind of discipleship "*a long obedience in the same direction*". That's the practice of pressing on – choosing Jesus today, and again tomorrow, even when the road is rough.

**Practice Prompt:** Where in your faith have you grown weary, apathetic or drifted off course? Where is Jesus no longer first? Today, intentionally realign. Ask the Holy Spirit for strength to keep going. Then take one deliberate step: get back to prayer, pick up the Word, reconnect with your church community, or grab a coffee with someone and confess what's weighing you down. Forget what's behind. Fix your eyes ahead. Jesus is worth it. Press on.

**Prayer:** Jesus, where my life is hard and I feel like giving up, remind me today that you are worth it. Strengthen me to press on, not in my own effort, but in your grace. Fix my eyes on you and help me to follow you, one step at a time, as I continue my *long obedience in the same direction*. Amen.

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### DAY 7: THE PRACTICE OF PEACE

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

NIV

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Today, we're reflecting on the practice of peace. If we're not careful, we can misread today's verse. "*Do not be anxious about anything*" (verse 6) can land like a blunt instrument – especially in a world where anxiety is so deeply woven into our lives. To the weary or overwhelmed, it might sound like Paul is offering little more than dismissive spiritual stoicism: "*Just stop worrying.*" But that would be a grave misreading of both Paul and the passage.

Context is everything. Right before this famous command, Paul writes a short but significant phrase: "*The Lord is near*" (Philippians 4:5). This is not a throwaway line. It's the theological engine behind everything that follows. The call to resist anxiety is not rooted in pithy willpower, but in powerful proximity: God's proximity. Rather than urging us to suppress our fears, Paul is urging us to relocate them into the presence of the living God.

From here, Paul gives us a roadmap for the practice of peace. First, "*in every situation*," we are to "*present [our] requests to God*" (verse 6). But notice how he tells us to do it: "*by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving.*" Each word matters.

**Prayer** reminds us we are not alone. It is relational and formational, renewing our minds and realigning our perspective as we cry out to God.

**Petition** invites specificity: naming our fears, needs, and hopes.

**Thanksgiving** reshapes our posture, anchoring us in remembrance and trust.

This practice – repeated not occasionally but in every situation – prepares the soil of our hearts for God's peace to take root. And this peace is unlike anything the world can fabricate. It "*transcends all understanding*" (verse 7) because it doesn't come from our circumstances but from Christ Himself. Paul even describes it as a guard: actively protecting our hearts and minds from being overwhelmed, disoriented, or consumed.

Let this deep truth land: putting Jesus first in your life is the only path to true peace, because true peace only comes from Him. The more we prioritise noticing God's nearness, turning to Him with openness, and thanking Him for His grace, the more our lives become anchored – even when storms rage.

So don't delay. Practice peace today. Go to Jesus first – again and again – with your prayers, petitions and gratitude. He is near. And He loves you.

**Practice Prompt:** Take 1-2 minutes today, and each day this week, to pause and do three things:

**1. Acknowledge God's nearness** — say aloud or write: "*The Lord is near.*"

**2. Name your worries** — in prayer, present one specific anxiety or burden to God. Be honest and clear.

**3. Give thanks** — name three things you're grateful for, however small.

Set an alarm, tie it to a regular moment (like your morning coffee or commute), and let this become a daily '*peace practice*' of letting go and leaning in.

**Prayer:** Jesus, I still my mind and become aware of your nearness. I bring to you now the things that are weighing on me: [*take a moment to name your worries*]. I entrust them, one by one, into your hands. As I do so, I'm mindful of the good things you have given me. Today, I give thanks for [*name three things you are grateful for*]. I receive the gift of your peace – the peace that transcends my understanding. Amen.

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### DAY 8: THE PRACTICE OF CONTENTMENT

PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13

NIV

*I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*

Over the past days, we've sat with Paul in his Roman house-prison, listening in on his hard-won wisdom to the Philippian church. Amid his beautiful words, we've uncovered deeply counter-cultural practices that help us place Jesus first in the cluttered reality of our everyday lives.

Today we close with a practice that weaves them all together: contentment.

Ours is a culture engineered to make you feel like you *aren't* enough and *don't have enough*. Entire industries run on this discontentment. Ads and algorithms subtly sow the lie that your life would finally be complete if you just bought the thing, achieved the dream, or upgraded your image.

But Paul, writing from grimy confinement, offers a radical counter-vision: *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances"* (verse 11). This was a man who had walked through the highest highs and lowest lows. And through it all, he cultivated what many spend their lives chasing: a soul anchored in Christ, not his circumstances.

Notice Paul's words: *"I have learned."* Contentment didn't come naturally — even for him. It was forged carefully through faith, perspective, and perseverance. Paul didn't deny his needs, but he intentionally refused to let them define his joy.

How did he achieve this? Through union with Christ: *"I can do all this through him who gives me strength"* (verse 13). Life hadn't stopped hurting, but Jesus had proved strong enough to hold him in it. For Paul, as He can be for us, Jesus became the wellspring of resilience, the antidote to comparison, and the calm in the chaos: everything he needed.

Contentment, then, is both posture and practice. It's shaped as we mindfully celebrate what God has already given. It's strengthened as we resist the world's false promises and trust that Christ is enough. Like the other habits we've explored, it forms the rhythm of a **"Jesus first"** life.

And here's the roundabout wonder of it all: as you live this way — resisting the culture, prioritising Jesus — more contentment begins to grow quietly in its shadow. You stop measuring your worth by what you've achieved. You start to see that joy doesn't come from grasping, but from receiving. You discover the whole point of it all.

So here's your invitation today: practice contentment in Christ. Let it become your rhythm. Because when you put Jesus first, you'll discover you have everything you need.

**Practice prompt:** Take five quiet minutes today to write down:

- **3 things you're grateful for**
- **1 way Jesus has been enough for you**
- **1 area where you feel discontent**

Ask Jesus to help you trust Him in that space — and to grow contentment in you, right where you are. Then, as a final act of this journey, write a one-sentence commitment that sums up your desire to live a **Jesus first** life — and return to it whenever you forget what matters most.

**Prayer:** Jesus, thank you for the holy wisdom embedded in Paul's letter to the Philippians. Over these next weeks, help me to put what I have read into practice, building a contented life where you are **first** and **foremost**, in everything, **forever**. Amen.