



PHILIPPIANS

GROWING IN CHRIST

Series: Philippians: Growing in Christ

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Text: Philippians 4:1-9

Title: Stand Firm

Good morning, Mercy Church! I hope you are well. If I haven't met you before, my name is Scott and I'm one of the pastors here. As we start this morning, I wanted us to in our minds go back to the first century church. You're seeing a local church in Philippi, and they have been laboring faithfully as a church family for a better part of 12 years. You see that they have suffered for their faith, they've faced opposition, in-fighting,

and trails. But you've also seen that they have had great triumphs! This is a great church. They've seen the lost come to faith. The kind of people that they thought would have never trusted Jesus. You see how these people have persevered in the midst of dire circumstances. This 12-year-old church has seen it all at this point and now as they show up to church on a normal Sunday, they hear from the leadership that the Apostle Paul, the great hero missionary, wrote them a personal letter. And this letter was going to be read in its entirety to the congregation. I mean can you imagine it?! It's Paul, the man they've been praying for while he's been in prison. And he wrote them personal letter?! The excitement would have been palpable. This is the great apostle, and he wrote them a letter from prison.

Then imagine the people sitting and listening to this letter being read aloud and they're locked in. They hang on every word as they hear about how to live as followers of Christ. They hear about his imprisonment and how his imprisonment has led to the gospel being preached more boldly. They heard that he wasn't sure if he would get out of jail this time, but for him to live is Christ, and to die was a gain. They heard that even though they feel the brokenness of Philippi, take heart...Their citizenship isn't there, it's in heaven. And that the presence of suffering didn't mean they were doing something wrong, in fact, quite the opposite. Suffering was granted to them on behalf of Christ. They heard about Christian humility





and not seeking their own interests. He taught them that their goal should be to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and that they should take fellowship in Christ's sufferings. Last week we heard that they needed to be gritty in their obedience in light of God's sovereign rule and their heavenly citizenship.

They are hearing all these amazing truths and then as we get to the end of this letter. Paul transitions changes his tone and shepherds the heart of this church. He is going to address a bunch of things that Christians deal with when they are a part of a church family. I almost entitled this sermon: Stuff Christians deal with when they are part of a church. Paul knows that when you are part of a church family, especially when you've been part of that church family for a while, things get can get difficult. Things that can knock individuals and an entire body off course if we're not mindful. There are things that you and I deal with that makes it difficult to stay course.

Mercy Church... this is a word for us. Paul is going to address stuff that we deal with as a local church. It's not a comfortable word, but it's an important and timely word. Mercy Church, we're a 7-year-old church, which means that the honeymoon phase of church has worn off. We've been here long enough for relationships to get difficult, for you to have been sinned against or you having sinned against someone else. We've

been here long enough for mission drift to happen and like Philippi, Paul is going to remind us how to stay the course. Paul is closing this letter to this church who have committed to be on mission together and he's going to shepherd them through it. Paul will gently, but directly address some issues in this Church and how they can move forward. We need to hear this. Just like it did with the church in Philippi, Paul and the Holy Spirit are going to get all up in our business for a bit and if we take this word to heart, it will transform this body!

Let's stand and read God's word... I will read Phil 4:1-9.

4 So then, my dearly loved and longed for brothers and sisters, my joy and crown, in this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.



⁸ Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things. ⁹ Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Amen! You can be seated. The first thing I want us to see today from our brother Paul is that as a church we need to

1. Stand firm in the Lord. Vs 1

Right away in verse one we see that Paul addresses this church that he loves by tenderly connecting them to what he just said previously. In verse one, he says “So then.” He’s saying here that he’s connecting what he’s about to say to what he just finished saying. What he said in the previous chapter was that he didn’t want them to give up because their citizenship is in heaven. No matter what was happening in their church or in their lives personally, Paul wanted them to persevere because their citizenship isn’t in Philippi, it’s in heaven and one day God will make all of the things that are difficult become untrue when we are with him in heaven. So, he’s saying in light of that reality... ⁴ So then, my dearly loved and longed for brothers and sisters, my joy and crown, in this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends. He tells them to

stand firm. That’s his imperative, his encouragement and command is to stand firm. He wants them to stick with it, stay on mission, to never give up. How though? How are they to do this? He said to stand firm “in the Lord.” He wants them to endure and gives them source by which this endurance comes from. It only comes from the Lord. This is a good reminder for us! Our strength doesn’t come from within ourselves. It doesn’t come from our wisdom to fix things, our pedigree, the amount of time we’ve followed Jesus, no! It comes from our union with Christ! That phrase “in the Lord” is said three times in this passage alone. In verse 2, “agree in the Lord”. In verse 4 “Rejoice in the Lord.” In verse 7 “the peace of God... will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Paul’s challenge to stand firm wasn’t him telling them or to us that we need to endure in our own strength. We need him! What Paul will asking them to do in the verses following will require effort, but he’s telling them that they will need the power of God to do it. The church in Philippi was tired in their laboring because they were dealing with a lot! The city of Philippi was a big city and there was no end to the problems. The same is true for us. Our vision is to see a gospel awakening in the city of charlotte that is carried to the ends of the earth. We made that our vision because there’s no way we can do it in our strength. We can never do it by ourselves. But God can. He can do it! And we need him to stand firm in the Lord and not to waver despite all of the brokenness in each one of us, in our church, in our city, and our world. Paul will give us some



practical ways to do that in a few verses, but first he needs to address a real threat in this Philippian church, and he addresses it in a super direct manner.

² I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life.

2. Stand firm in our relationships. Vs. 2-3

Uh oh! We've got some conflict here. Let's zoom back in time for a moment and imagine this scene. This congregation is sitting there listening to Paul encourage and challenge them in their walks with Jesus and both of these ladies are sitting there and they hear their names mentioned by Paul. Apparently, these two women were in some kind of a disagreement with each other. We don't know exactly what it was, but we can see a few things here. Paul highlights the fact that these women have co-labored with Paul at his side to plant this church. These women were prominent figures in this church and Paul knew this argument was a distraction from the mission and it needed to stop. This is not good for this church and Paul wanted them to address it immediately. But look at how he did it. He said I urge Eudia and I urge Syntyche. He urges them individually. I urge you Eudia... and I urge you Syntyche. What was he urging them to do? He was urging and

pleading with them to agree in the Lord. You see that? What's he getting at here? By agree he wants them to be of the same mind to have the same heart. He is urging them to have the right attitudes toward each other so that they can continue to labor together through this local church.

This happens with us too, right? This is some of the most painful things that can happen at church. These women have served at this church and been members for a long time and then they got into a fight. Y'all, relationships in church can get hard sometimes. You're part of the same community group for years and then you look up and you're in an argument with someone you would have called a friend, mentor. Now, it's awkward. You avoid each other on Sundays. And every week that goes by the tension gets bigger and bigger and you wonder if it's better to just join another group or maybe even another church. The feeling of betrayal or disappointment from conflict with a friend hurts sooo bitterly. But Paul calls them back and urges them to agree in the Lord. Maybe you've been there before or maybe even now. You need to hear the words of Paul that you may not be able to agree in everything, but you can agree on one thing... the most important thing... their commitment to the gospel. To agree in the Lord after major conflict with a friend, a mentor, can only come from imitating the humility of Jesus, who gave up his rights for the good of others. To resolve conflict, we need the attitude of Jesus. It's only because of the Lord's power, the commonality



with the Lord, and because their willingness to submit to the Lord, that these women or you will be able to resolve your differences.¹ This will take real humility and real gospel bravery.

And you might have missed this book look back with me in verse 3, **Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life.** Paul appeals to the church to help them to agree in the Lord! I ask also you, true partner, to help these women. By partner, he's meaning this local body. Paul wants them and for us to see that Conflict resolution is a corporate thing. Since sinful in-fighting is harmful to the body. It will also take the body to help bring unity. We need to help each other to agree in the Lord. If we see two people not in step, we encourage them to seek reconciliation. Jesus said this is at the very heart of what it means to follow him. In Jesus' famous sermon on the mount, he said in Matthew 5:9: **"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God."** And in order for there to be peace, you have to go and make peace. Peace maker. We have to be like this. In-fighting inside of the church can be so destructive to the body but also for the watching world. What does it say about our faith if we can't agree in the Lord in the midst of disagreement?! A practical

way to do this is to constantly point people to talk to each other. If someone is gossiping, you can say "sounds like that's something you should talk with them about." A great way to be a peacemaker is to continuously encourage brothers and sisters who might be at odds to just sit down together and discuss it. We need to stamp out all threats of disunity. Don't give the enemy any room to mess with our family. Will that be hard? Yes! Will it be awkward, yes! But unity in the church family is worth it! Our Mission as a church and our witness in the gospel is too important for petty fights knock us off course. My prayer is that we fight the enemy by people taking on the title of peacemaker and seeking help bring peace to every sphere of our church and our city!

As we move toward verse 4, we see Paul pointing the church towards a proper perspective.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

¹ Christ-Centered Exposition, pg. 169



3. We need to stand firm and zoom out. Vs. 4-7

Here is what I mean by zoom out. Paul is hearing from the church leaders all about what is happening in this church. And they are facing a lot. The pressure was on. Ministry as a church was hard. When they're facing individual struggles and pain... and facing conflict, the thing they need more than anything is proper perspective! Often times we need that perspective change as well. We need to zoom out, re-center our hearts and minds toward a proper perspective on our circumstances. When we isolate or when we allow unhelpful thought patters to go unchecked, we can end up in the darkest places. Paul knows that this church needs to zoom out and see the big picture. Sometimes when we're hyper focused on ourselves we miss the beauty of the Lord and his activity in our lives in the midst of our circumstances. But because we've lost perspective we can't see properly. The first thing he tells them is to **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!** The book of Philippians is often called the book of Joy. In 104 verses, Paul mentions joy or rejoicing 16 times. Paul is also telling them to who to rejoice in... "in the Lord" and he tells them when they are to rejoice... "always." Then he tells them again, rejoice! He said it again just in case they forget the first time he said it. Paul knew that the Philippians, like us, would struggle to maintain joy. George Mueller once

said, "The first great and primary business... every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord."² One of our big problems as sinful men and women is that our auto pilot is broken. It is always set toward selfishness, irritability, and meeting the needs of our flesh. We don't wake up in the morning everyday with our hearts warmed and happy towards Jesus. No! Our hearts are cold. They need perspective. That's why we seek to spend time and abide in Christ. And this is just on a normal day. You add difficult circumstances to your lives... man we're going to need much more of Christ. Notice that Paul doesn't tell them to only rejoice when your circumstances are going well. He says rejoice in the Lord always. We need to do it when our circumstances are terrible. Many people think that we can only have joy when you get what you desire. But real joy comes when you realize what you deserve.³ We deserve no good gifts. We don't deserve a relationship with a kind, gentle, and generous God. We don't. Yet we were given the greatest gift! And if you're like me you may have thought that I've done this before. I've spent time rejoicing. It's not working. Things are too hard! Please keep doing it. If you can't rejoice in your earthly circumstances, that's ok. Rejoice in the gospel. And even this... Rejoice about what your future circumstances will hold! This isn't your home! Joy will come. But it only comes through Christ. You have to hear this.... Rejoicing always is how you prepare and cultivate a theology

² Christ-centered exposition, 171.

³ Tony Merida.



of suffering in your life. Church we will suffer! Christ promised that we would. He promised this over and over again, yet we over and over again are shocked when suffering or when we're living in bad circumstances.

Can we be honest for a moment...? One of the things that can be difficult for us is to receive a word like, "Rejoice in your circumstances" from a brother or sister that you know isn't suffering at all. And it seems like they have it all. And we become a little petty. First, we need to receive their word because they are right. But second, it can be really difficult to hear this when we feel like people just don't or we feel like they can't understand what we're walking through. And what's crazy about this command from Paul is that the people have nothing they can say back to Paul. They knew that this word was coming from a fellow sufferer. He wasn't being obtuse. He was demonstrating through this letter what it means to rejoice and serve the church even in the midst being a hole in the ground. Most likely, Paul was in a tiny hole sitting in his urine and feces. Paul was acquainted with suffering. So, whatever their circumstances were, and for many of them it was really bad... they knew that this was a word coming from a great shepherd. And Paul wasn't holding it over them. He wasn't saying..." figure it out guys, I have it way worse than you." He didn't make suffering a competition between them. Paul's joy came from the fact that he remembered what he was saved from. He hated Christ! He was a murderer and an

idolator. His aim used to be to kill and arrest Christians and now he's given his life to planting churches! It didn't matter to him if he was in a jail cell. Who cares! His citizenship isn't on this earth. Heaven awaits! And as long as he has breath in his lungs, he's going to praise Jesus no matter the cost. No matter how he's treated. Even when he's betrayed. Shipwrecked. Snake bitten. Hungry. Phil. 4:13 says that he can do all things through Christ who gives him strength! That verse was written to the church to help us endure suffering! It's in the bible to teach us how to be content in all circumstances. Not to write on our basketball shoes hoping that it will help you dunk a basketball. Mercy rejoice! Jesus has washed you. He has rescued you. He's given you a family here. We're not perfect! And you're not either. Let's remember the gospel!

And when we are rejoicing always... it is a testimony to the world. Look in verse 5. **Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.** Scholars say that the word for gentleness is a difficult one to translate into our English. That's why there are so many different words used in our faithful translations. CSB says graciousness. ESV says reasonableness. NASB says gentle spirit. NIV says gentleness. I think the best way to think about it is that Paul is saying we're to be self-controlled and show restraint in our interactions with others. Graciousness is the opposite of being argumentative or self-seeking. When we are rejoicing always. When we zoom out and have proper perspective, we will be a gracious people and



a gracious church. Gospel people should be the hardest people to offend on the planet. Why? We've been forgiven of sooooo much. How can we not be gracious towards others? Especially our enemies. Paul adds more perspective language to the end of this verse that "The Lord is near." Paul, again providing a zoom out perspective moment. He's saying, "Hey, the Lord is near. He loves you. And he wants to provide you with all that you need for your interactions with those inside and outside of the church." I don't know about you, but everything is way too charged in our culture. Even with news outlets and social media. The fringe extremists get all the retweets and airtime and all it does is inflame us and cause us to have to yell louder just to be heard. May that never be true of us. Not of God's people. Let's not be known for hot takes... no. Let's be known for gentle answers that turn away wrath. Not irritability. Graciousness. Grace is what we were saved by right? We can only be gracious like Christ when we see how gracious he was in saving us. When we have that perspective, we can even treat our enemies with kindness.

And then Paul hits us again with this one. ⁶ Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁴ John Ortberg

In our day, it seems that people are struggling with worry and anxiety more than ever. Studies show that this is true. But, let's remember that this is primarily written to a church body, not to individuals. So, when Paul penned this, he was telling this church to not worry about anything. So, we have to start by applying it to the church and then we can apply it to ourselves. Remember, Paul's wanting them to zoom out and have perspective so that this church can stay the on mission. They had a lot to worry about. Again, there both internal and external threats. Paul tells them not to be frightened by their opponents (1:28). They were worried about their church's finances (4:19). They are worried about their ministry partners, Paul and Epaphroditus. They had infighting. There was plenty for them to be anxious about. Paul knows that as a church they had a battle on their hands. Here at Mercy, I know we all have worries and things we're anxious about. In my rough draft for this sermon, I tried to write examples of things I worry about for our church and the list got so long I had to cut it. Paul knows that one of the greatest threats to a church will be their ability to handle their worry and anxiety. Worry and anxiety are joy killers. It sucks the life out of everything. I've heard one pastor say that worry and anxiety is like carrying around an alarm clock all day long that never shuts up! ⁴ So, Paul gives us the plan. The Lord wants us to



come to him. He tells us to pray and petition him, and here comes another perspective moment. He tells us to do it with thanksgiving. Why? Because when you take your worries to the Lord while also thanking him, it changes how we pray. Our prayers go from foolish requests to wise pleas for his help. And look what happens when we do this...

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

What Paul is trying to get the church to see is that prayer has to be primary. The only antidote to worry is prayer! We need unhurried. Mindful. Consistent prayer. But that's not what our lives usually look like. Our prayers look more like drive-by's. We fly through them. And we don't sit and surrender our circumstances. When we sit and pray consistently, God doesn't always change our circumstances, but he changes us! And as we're changed the peace of God which surpasses all understanding... meaning that despite even the craziest circumstances, he will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ! Amazing. And as our he guards our hearts and minds, Paul also encourages to fill our minds.

⁸ Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on

these things. ⁹ Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

4. Stand firm in our thought life.

Paul wants us to fill our minds with praiseworthy things. It's common for eastern religions and spiritualists to say that we need to empty our minds. That peace and a good life can only be found by emptying. Christianity says the opposite. We need to fill our minds. But we need to fill it in the right way. Theology is important. We're all theologians. Every single one of us. We're either good ones or bad ones. What we spend time thinking about is what changes us. It informs and warps our character. Good or bad. Paul tells us to think on what's true not what we know to be untrue. Whatever is honorable, not dishonorable, just not unjust. What's pure, not impure. What is lovely, not repulsive. We need to dwell on what is praiseworthy. We need to dwell, think on things that are true. In Romans 12, Paul says something similar that we need to be transformed by the renewal of our mind. He also says in Romans 8 that we need to set our minds on the things of the Spirit. Remember earlier how I mentioned that our autopilots are broken. Many of us operate this way in our thought life. We're not thoughtful men and women. No, we need to set our minds on truth. And we need others to help us...



⁹ Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Paul tells them to imitate him. We need Godly examples. Paul says to do what you've heard and seen in him. Some of us need emulate others those who have been doing this a little bit longer. Ask them. What are you reading? What is God teaching you? What are you learning? Can you help me think through? Don't float. Find someone to help you. If you don't know where to start. Ask someone to coffee by saying, "Hey! I see how you walk with Jesus. Can we get some coffee sometime so I can ask you some questions about (whatever)? They will say yes, I'm sure!

As we close... man! What a word from Paul. Challenging, full of hope. Church, we need this. We're in such a pivotal moment for our church but we need to stand firm in the Lord! We need to depend on him to stand firm in our relationships, perspective, and thought life. The God of peace is with us!

Let's pray.