

# Philippians Unplugged

*Meditations from a pastor: 4:1-23*

If you are visiting is for the first time today we are finishing up the book of Philippians. This series really focused on the discipline of listening to God. I used no commentaries, no input from pastors, just a lot of time spent reading the chapter over and over again, and listening for His insight. I have spent hours training my mind to be focused and my mouth to be silenced in contemplation, so I can hear what God wants to teach me. I wrestled with this chapter because there were several sections that seemed disconnected somewhat—but the thing to do when you wrestle with God’s Word is to keep wrestling. Anyhow, after laboring in contemplation for a week, the theme hit me Friday morning like a fresh fragrance from the gentle breeze.

I want to jump right in so you can see how this chapter unfolds.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

The first verse sets the theme for this whole chapter, which is standing firm in Christ. You realize that being a Christian and standing firm in Christ are two different things. Honestly, as I reflect on my Christian life the times that I have experienced the most joy and reward are the times I stood firm in Christ. One of the overarching themes of Philippians is to rejoice. But why is it that we have a hard time rejoicing in our Christian experience? I think it revolves around us not committing ourselves to stand firm in Christ. In fact, I am sure of it. The reality is that God wants to bless us but he also wants to test us to see whether we will really stand firm in Christ. Now there are many outside influences that discourage us from standing firm in Christ. As we walk thru this chapter we will bump into some of those tests that keep us from being firm.

## **Test # 1. Wasting Energy Fighting with One another**

2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Here, the apostle Paul shares some sort of conflict between Euodia and Syntyche. We are not sure what it is but that is probably best. If we knew, we would probably take sides. The overarching principle is that when it comes to conflict we should work things out for the sake of the Lord. Now if there is one thing that can challenge you from standing firm in Christ it is people. The problem often elevates when the focus is on our needs and wants as opposed to what the Lord wants from us. We have heard the divorce rate for Christians is the same for those who aren’t. That should never be the case. One of the most devastating realities I have experienced is when Christians get divorced and it gets downright nasty.

Now I realize it takes two people to walk in the Lord together to make it work; but this does not excuse the innocent party from remaining firm in Christ. It is good Paul did not give us the details of this rift; he did not want us to take sides. One Christian agrees with one—another agrees with the other. Paul says for the sake of Christ agree in the Lord. “But you don’t understand my situation! I was the victim! I was the one wronged!” We are always trying to get others to take our side. A wise woman once said when she was urged to see the injustice done to her by another, “Maybe that person is just having a bad day.” For the sake of Jesus, don’t take sides. Just encourage those who want you to take their side to work things out in a godly way, even if the relationship has been severed beyond the point of no return. I realize in some cases, there has to be a third party to help people through relational strains. That is probably why Paul asks the “true companion” to help these women work toward reconciliation. Sometimes I wonder if they were fighting over a man.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6 the writer encourages Christians not to take each other to a civil court where they can see our filthy baggage; but to work this out through Christian mediation. Folks, we are called to a higher standard in marriage, in relationships, how we interact with strangers, how we treat the poor. If we have issues with others, we need to work through them—possibly with the help of another—so we can move forward in our Christian walk. Nothing keeps us

stagnant like people. Notice how Paul ends that particular section; he encourages them again to rejoice in the Lord. If you want to rejoice in Jesus; you have to stand firm to Christian convictions. If you want to rejoice in Jesus you can't spend your time hating others. The bottom line, especially if one is a Christian, is that our names are written in the book of life. This may seem trite and shallow to some folks; but those are the folks that usually want to take someone's side. Bottom line: Agree to do the right thing in Jesus! So people represent one obstacle when it comes to standing firm in Christ; the second one here has to do with anxiety or worry.

## **Test # 2. Anxiety or worry about the Future**

5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This is one of my favorite verses because it is a promise that God give us peace in Christ Jesus if we come to him in prayer and thanksgiving. Standing firm in the Lord means that we ask him to help relieve our anxiety and the things that cause us stress. This verse is a promise from God that he will give us peace when it comes to issues that cause us to have worry. Keep in mind this does mean you just pray one time and then your good. Sometimes we need to keep praying and praying because we don't have that peace. You all realize we don't make good decisions if we are filled with anxiety.

One of the things I recommend is when you are awake at night feeling anxious about something that will take place, don't just think about it in bed. You'll be up for hours. Instead get out of bed and just tell God the things that are causing you the stress. If Korban has something heavy on his heart I will do everything I can to bring him peace and relief because I am his father. God feels the same way about us. He wants us to share the burdens we have on our heart.

What are some things that cause us to have anxiety? There are several.

- a. Confrontation of people. I suspect Paul says this in relation to Euodia and Syntyche.
  1. asking someone out, 2. breaking up, 3. asking for a raise
- b. Getting laid off at work, looking for work, paying our bills, buying or selling a house,

God does not want us to keep this anxiety to ourselves. He does not want us to labor without making time to come to him in prayer. If we are anxious about decisions, don't make them in this state; instead make them after you are prayed up in him. Remember this is God's promise. I know it has worked in my life and it will work in yours. If anything causes anxiety; he will help you through. You just have to commit yourself to praying and standing firm in Christ.

## **Test # 3. Controlling your thought life**

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

This is another fabulous verse that should be memorized and recited over and over again. Again, what we are dealing with are things that keep us from standing firm in Christ. If it is not people or anxiety that keeps you from experiencing that fulfilling relationship with God, another challenger is our thought life. There was an old adage when I went to school that stated you are what you eat. I think a better one is "You are what you think." We live in a world where there are many things vying for our attention. One of the biggest hindrances to having a relationship with God is lust because we know things like fantasizing about men or women who are not your spouses, that pornography, keeps us from having a thought life that is pure. The reality of it is that lust makes us feel dirty before a holy and righteous God. If it is not lust, have you ever noticed there are a lot of negative people who like to spend their time looking at what is wrong in the world instead of what is good. I told our men's leadership that I know a pastor in the area who is always criticizing, always talking about what his people are not doing, always pointing out area we are not good at that it is very difficult to be around him because the only thing you can talk about are negative things.

But standing firm in God means training your mind to think about things that are just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise. God want us to be conscious about what we think of in life because they give us a sense of appreciation and help us to be positive people.

I'm telling you the enemy wants to fill our minds with all kinds of things like needing to watch television all the time so we won't use our mind, the internet so we can spend hours wasting our time, or else he is just satisfied with the routine events in our life to keep us from thinking about the good. He wants us to be preoccupied with going to sleep, with getting our morning coffee, with going to work, with coming home to eat dinner, with sitting on the couch to watch TV, with going to bed so we can do it all over again. The enemy does not want you to focus on Jesus, who is just, pure, lovely, praiseworthy; he likes it better when your mind is on cruise control just doing the same old routine.

The best thing we can do is change our routine. Go for evening walks, read an inspiring book, spend time studying God's word and praying. Maybe even just buying a journal and listing all the good things that God has provided in our lives. Part of standing firm in Jesus is learning how to control our minds so that we have a positive and thankful outlook in life. Make no mistake, the enemy is in a battle for your mind.

#### **Test # 4. Learning to be content with what God has given you.**

10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Here Paul says that being content with your present circumstances is the right mindset when it comes to serving Christ. The wrong mindset to have is one that complains about their circumstances or wants other people to feel sorry for them. What we need less of in Christian circles are whiners. The problem occurs when we spend more time focusing on what we don't have than being grateful for what we do. In reality; God is not going to bless you more if you aren't grateful for what he has given you, no matter how little it is. Remember the Scripture, he who is faithful with a little will be faithful with more. If you are not grateful to God for your life, that you know him, that you have a job, food on the table—do you think He is going to want to bless you financially? If you do not treat other people with respect and honor—do you think He is going to bless you with Mr. or Mrs. Right? The right mindset is to say “Thank you God for what you have given me. I promise I will do my best to honor you. I will honor you when I don't have a job because you have given me shelter. I will honor you by having a good attitude while I work at McDonalds's, busing tables, I will honor you why I do labor outside in the rain, I will honor you why I collect welfare and food stamps. I will honor you in my new job. It does not matter what your situation, being content with your physical needs will not only please God—but will also make a splashing impression on others. You may have a small bank account, or be forever single, or have a small church, or have a beaten up car—and how you respond to those physical realities will make a positive or negative impression on others. God wants us to be make a positive one.

If there is one thing you should be discontent about it is your spiritual growth. Once we become content in that area we quit growing, and unfortunately too many Christian's live there. So we grow in Christ and we don't complain or say, “Woe is me to everyone.” The attitude is that Lord, I may not have much in my life from a monetary perspective; but I do know you and I want you to know I am grateful because anything more is just icing on the cake.

You demonstrate what it means to stand firm in the Lord when you have a mindset that is content with your physical circumstances. The fifth way we stand firm in the Lord is by giving.

#### **Test # 5. Learning to give your money to help spread the Gospel.**

14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a

sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

There are plenty of Christians who worship with their hands held up on Sundays, but they don't reach into their wallet with those same hands to give to the church so they can continue the work of sharing the gospel. Paul, an apostle of God understood the reality that there are churches whose members just do not give. Yet when it came to the Philippians they gave abundantly. People use all kinds of excuses for not giving to the work of the ministry, the most popular being they just don't make very much money. But did you know in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 8 Paul says though the Philippian church, which was a Macedonian church, was in dire poverty, they insisted on giving above and beyond their means. They pleaded so they could give more.

As an attendee of a church one message people are almost unanimous in saying they don't want to hear involves tithing. Well just to make things fair; that is one of the sermons we hate to preach because it is no fun for us either. But the reality is that we have salaries to pay, utilities, office expenses, insurance, etc., and that cannot happen if you don't give. Ultimately, I have come to realize it is all God's money anyway and He chooses to use the church to accomplish His mission

If you want to grow as a man or woman of God giving money is an important area that separates the casual Christian from those that stand firm in God. The reality is that God has promised to bless you if you give away your money for the spread of the gospel. He has said He will open the floodgates of heaven.

The Philippian church is commended because unlike other churches, they gave over and over again to Paul's ministry. They gave their resources, they sent Epaphroditus to be an encouragement to Paul in prison and supply his needs. As they church they recognized that they had been radically redeemed by the cross of Christ and they wanted others to as well. In the end, when you give it is a sacrifice to God that is pleasing and acceptable to Him and as Paul mentions, He will supply your every need according to Christ Jesus.

#### **Test # 6. Being Grateful and having Fellowship with other Believers.**

21 Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. 22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

23 s The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

The last thing Paul mentions about standing firm is that we are to stand firm with other brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to greet them with appreciation and gratitude and recognize the miracle that they know Jesus. In other words, we are to surround ourselves with Christians. Christianity was not meant to be experienced alone; it was always meant to be experienced communally. We need to be in fellowship outside Sunday mornings so we can encourage each other to grow in our faith. Christians that stand firm make sure they surround themselves with other Christians who are trying to grow in Jesus.

**Conclusion:** God wants us to stand firm in Him despite people who make it difficult, stressful situations that cause anxiety, thoughts that seek to occupy our memory banks, the tough or wonderful circumstances in our lives, and the temptation to disconnect from the saints for whatever reason. The Christian life will be a rewarding experience, an adventurous experience, a fulfilling experience, a deeply personal experience if we commit ourselves to standing firm in the Lord without the temptation to compromise. In the book of Revelation God says He does not like lukewarm followers of Jesus. Lukewarm Christians are those who allowed the hurdles of standing firm in Christ to overtake them. But God doesn't want us to be lukewarm; He wants us to stand firm in Jesus because He wants us to experience the best possible life we can. I guarantee that committing yourself to that goal will be well worth it.