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In light of today's passage, I think it's pretty cool that the 18th reason to rehearse the gospel to ourselves every day is that the gospel gives us perspective in our trials. The author says, "I realize that the gospel is not just one piece of good news that fits into my life somewhere among all the bad. I realize instead that the gospel makes genuinely good news out of every other aspect of my life, including my severest trials." I'd love to ponder that with you as we consider Philippians 4.

*Blessings,
Jonna*

Philippians 4:1-9

Today, I pick up the last chapter of Philippians. What does it mean to be a Kingdom Outpost? I love the example of the Philippian church because I see such a wholehearted commitment and devotion to the Lord, and yet I also see that they weren't perfect. Today's passage makes that clear. They weren't perfect, but Paul taught them how to handle their relationship with the Lord when life gets difficult. So... what does a Kingdom Outpost do in the face of conflict and anxiety?

First... stand firm in the face of conflict ~

Vs. 1-3 ~ "Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 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."

Therefore... in light of the fact that we are not citizens of earth but citizens of heaven, and the Lord is going to come back for us and transform our lowly bodies to be like His glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21) because this is an absolute promise and truth... stand firm in the

Lord.

Paul loved these people. He wanted the absolute best for them. He wasn't telling them to stand firm in the Lord to domineer over them and come down on them with harsh commands. He called them "brothers and sisters", "beloved", those he "longed for", his "joy and his crown." These are words of affection, the affection of Jesus. To truly love someone is not to just say, "I want you to be happy." It's to say, "I want you to have a happiness that never ends." The only way to have that is to stand firm in the Lord with unshakable faith in Him.

Don't let any person or circumstance shake your faith and commitment to the Lord. What can shake our faith? Conflict with someone we were once close to and together served the Lord.

Two women in the church, Euodia and Syntyche, were not "agreeing in the Lord." They had let some kind of conflict get in the way. These women were believers who had served side by side with Paul, proclaiming the gospel and working alongside Paul and the other believers "whose names are in the book of life." Revelation speaks of the book of life as the Lamb's book of life. Whoever's name is written in it will be alive in heaven with the Lord forever, and their name cannot be removed!

When two people in conflict are both wholly committed to the Lord, there is always room for restoration. But they sometimes need help to see that. The fact is, we're still stuck with our flesh that cries for us to choose SELF over UNITY in Christ, and pride can blind us and cause us to justify disunity and unforgiveness.

Sometimes we can't restore because the person isn't ready, but we can pray for the Lord to help our hearts and theirs so that healthy, God honoring restoration can happen. As leaders in the church, our job is not to ignore that there's a problem and say, "You're adults. Figure it out." Our job is to help restore when they're willing to be helped... and to continue to encourage them to be ready... As Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." Leaders need to be ready to help restore, and they need to be careful not to let pride or apathy get in the way.

Also, as leaders who help, it's really important that our loyalty is not to a person, but to the Lord. We can't take a person's side. I've learned that the hard way. Anytime someone tells their story, unless they're being REALLY humble and honest with themselves, they're probably sharing from a skewed perspective. And even when they're being humble and honest they still might not see the whole picture. Proverbs 18:17 says, "The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him." We need to ask the Lord to give us wisdom and loyalty to His word above all, while we love the people involved.

Second... stand firm in the face of anxiety ~

Vs. 4-7 ~ "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be

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

A Kingdom Outpost is able to stand firm in the midst of what would naturally cause anxiety because we know Him who is near. We can have joy, not necessarily in our circumstances, but in our Lord because He's near. We can be gentle, even with those with whom there's conflict or misunderstanding because our God is close. He's always ready to help and to give wisdom, courage, and strength... and peace. The answer is not to focus on the problem, but to focus on our Lord.

The answer is also not to beat myself up when I feel anxious over whatever situation I'm facing. Anxiety is what happens when I forget that my God is near, that He's good, that He has a good plan, and that He's able to carry out His plan.

Peace is what happens when I remember that the Lord is near and I talk to Him about why I'm anxious. I first tell Him the problem, then ask Him for a solution, and then thank Him for being so faithful and good. When I am standing firm in the Lord and thankfully sharing with Him the problem and my need, He faithfully guards my heart and my mind with His peace that rises above all my intellect or logic or understanding. The Lord has the whole picture in mind, He has the authority and the power to handle it all, He loves me and wants to guard me with His peace, and He's right here with me. The Lord helps me overcome the anxiety. He does not beat me up for having the anxiety.

I was thinking about God's role vs. my role. What does it look like to rely on Him and let Him lead while still doing what He wants me to do? I know what it looks like to muscle it. I've done that plenty.

Muscling it is a clear sign of a lack of faith. It's trying to take over God's job, and it doesn't work. To let God lead and stand firm in Him is to walk in faith. Like... when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry land... they obeyed God in faith, but they did not and could not part the waters of the Red Sea. God's job is to give me peace that is beyond my mind's comprehension. My job is to talk to Him about why I need His peace. Because I am IN CHRIST, He gives me that peace.

What do I do while I wait for His answers? Vs. 8-9 give me that answer ~

Vs. 8-9 ~ "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. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

Thinking about and practicing these things is literally plenty of work for me to without trying to take God's job. I need to be thinking about what's true. His word is true. What my mind understands about anything else may not be completely true because I don't have a full perspective. But thinking about God's word is always what is absolutely true. Think about what's honorable, not what sends my mind into a frenzy. Think about what's just and right, not what I'm afraid will happen if I don't keep trying to solve the problems on my own. Think about what's pure, what's holy. Jesus knows the whole picture and He has authority over it all. I can focus on Him. Think about what's lovely, not what's awful or unknown. Think about what's commendable or admirable, not what I'd really like to complain about. (I'm really trying to take my complaints to the Lord first before talking to anyone else. This is hard for me because I know He has answers for all my complaints, and so I feel guilty about bringing my complaints to Him. But His word says He still wants me to pour my heart out to Him, so I'm asking Him for help even to do that!) Think about what's excellent and what's worth praising. Again, so hard. So much easier to think about what's wrong! But this kind of thinking is what leads to peace. It is a lie from the pit of hell that tries to tell me I need to focus on the problem. I need to focus on the Problem Solver!

And don't just think about it. Receive it. Hear the word. See the truth of His word. Put into practice what I learn.

Don't try to muscle it. Let God lead.

Don't stick my head in the sand and do nothing.

Run to my Father and lean on Him. Hold His hand while He leads me to His peace. He's right here with me. Think about that. Remember that.

The Lord is my answer in the face of conflict. The Lord is my answer in the face of anxiety. The Lord is near. He is my peace. He is with me. Stand firm in Him. He is holding firmly onto me.