

## **Serving and Struggling Together**

Philippians 1:27-30

Rev. Brian Bill

February 8-9, 2025

When we bought our house in Central Illinois, one of the things that came with it was an obnoxious doorbell chime. Not only was the unit big and ugly but when someone rang it, it would blast out Beethoven's 5<sup>th</sup> or blare out all the verses of Auld Lang Syne. As hard as we tried, we couldn't get it to just ding-dong like a regular doorbell. Finally, out of exasperation, one day I ripped it off the wall.

A few days later, I decided to purchase and install a new doorbell and chimes. I knew I was in trouble when the lady at Ace Hardware told me it was a simple project anyone could do. When I got home, I studied the back of the package for about ten minutes, scratched my head a couple times, took a deep breath and went to work. Incidentally, Beth always clears out of the way when I tackle a DIY project because she's seen the shrapnel fly before. She doesn't want to witness me lose my sanctification.

After hooking up the wires in several different ways, creating more sparks than chimes, I jumped off the ladder, shoved the new doorbell back in the package and told Beth I needed my dad to do the job. I felt like a ding-dong. Once again, things did not go as I had planned. So much for it being quick and easy.

After pouting for a few minutes, I decided to lumber back up the ladder and tried again. Somehow I figured it out. I went out on the porch and rang that puppy for about a half hour, surprised that it now worked (Beth was even more surprised), and we were both thrilled not to hear a symphony every time someone came to our door.

My guess is things have not always gone as you have planned either. Your life has been anything but easy and your walk with Jesus has more worries than victories. Sometimes things just don't seem to work, even when you follow the directions. We're going to see in Philippians 1:27-30 how Paul moved from his personal situation to the problems the Philippians were having.

So far, he's shared four ways he discovered joy in the midst of all the junk he was going through.

- *God will complete His work in us as we partner with Him in His work.*
- *When you love someone, you'll lift them up in prayer. If you need help loving someone, pray until you love them.*
- *Since the gospel changes everything, it must change everything about us.*
- *You win either way when you live God's way.*

Now, Paul's concern is for Christians in the church. He's wondering if they will go in the tank when trials come. Will they pout when problems come? Will shrapnel fly when they start to suffer? Will they fold instead of being faithful? Will they get mad when things are bad? Will they turn on each other instead of working with each other?

Here's our main point: *It's worth it to live a worthy life.*

Let's read Philippians 1:27-30: ***“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”***

**1. Conduct yourself like Christ.** Let's consider the first phrase in verse 27: ***“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...”*** The word ***“only”*** is emphatic and means, *“Above all, at all costs, make this your one and only concern.”* One commentator translates it as *“just one thing.”* Whether Paul is set free or perishes in prison, there is only one thing he wants the Philippians to know.

This shows Paul's passion for the Philippians. He's essentially saying, *“Walk the talk”* or *“live up to who you are.”* This is the first command in the letter and is in the present tense, meaning this is a call for continuous obedience because our walk is always louder than our talk. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson who said, *“Your actions speak so loudly, I cannot hear what you are saying.”*

The Greek word translated “*manner*” is where we get “political” or “metropolitan” and is the main verb in these four verses, which in the original is just one long sentence. The basic idea is one of citizenship. Later in Philippians 3:20, Paul says that our “*citizenship is in heaven.*”

The citizens who lived in Philippi would immediately grasp the idea of having one’s citizenship in another place from where they were living. The Phillipians lived in Macedonia but were not known as Macedonians. Instead, they were known as Romans. Their identities had been changed when Caesar Augustus made their city a colony of Rome.

Acts 16:12 provides a clue: “...*Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.*” Located over 700 miles from Rome, Philippi enjoyed all the benefits and privileges of the Roman Empire. They were not taxed, their city was under Roman law and their culture reflected Rome, not the other cities around them. In short, they were loyal to another location and conducted themselves according to another culture. They adopted Roman dress, Roman names, and even spoke Latin, the language of Rome.

One commentator points out that Roman society was highly community-conscious, where the individual was subordinate to the state. People saw this as a privilege and were careful not to do anything that would bring disrepute to their citizenship.

The closest towns around here which reflect another culture is Pella, IA where most everything is Dutch or Bishop Hill, where everything is Swedish. Likewise, Paul is telling us that while we live here, our habits should reflect another place because our citizenship is in Heaven. Our job is to walk in a manner “*worthy of the gospel of Christ.*” This phrase refers to weighing something on the scales. While we cannot make ourselves worthy enough to receive the gospel, once we are saved, we’re called to live worthy of the gospel we have received. How we dress, how we speak, and how we act must line up with our ultimate loyalty. We are not just individuals who can do what we want; we are interdependent members of the community of faith, with our heritage firmly rooted in Heaven.

To live “*worthy*” of the gospel means to live so that your life gives proper weight to all that God has done for you. I like this paraphrase: “*Live in such a way that you are a credit to the message of Christ.*” An unworthy manner of

life is one that contradicts the claims of Christ and the gospel. Let's make sure our behavior is consistent with what we claim to believe. Let us be people about whom others say, *"If that's what a Christian is, then I want to be one, too."*

Alexander the Great once met a lazy soldier in his army with a bad attitude and asked for his name. The soldier replied, *"Alexander, sir."* Alexander the Great responded sharply, *"Either change your name, or change your ways!"*

It was inconceivable to Paul that a Christian would somehow turn people away from Heaven by the way they were living on earth. He also expressed this concern in Ephesians 4:1: ***"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."***

Paul is saying we're to live as if we're being watched, because we are: ***"...whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you..."*** Warren Wiersbe reminds us how the world around us knows the Gospel message by what they see in us:

*You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day,  
By the deeds that you do and the words that you say.  
People read what you write, whether faithful or true;  
Just what is the gospel according to you?*

Remember that people judge Heaven by the conduct of its citizens. We represent the gospel of Christ and therefore must live in a worthy way.

One pastor makes three observations:

- For salvation to be real it must change the way we live.
- Unbelievers draw conclusions about Jesus Christ by the way we live.
- In an increasingly pagan climate, we can make a huge impact by the way we live.

It was Mahatma Ghandi who said, *"I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike Christ."*

Carl Trueman writes, *"It is striking that in the New Testament, and in the early second century, Christians and pagans were differentiated not simply by what they believed but by how they behaved."*

I'm reminded of this penetrating question I heard some time ago, "*If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?*"

*It's worth it to live a worthy life.*

**2. Cooperate without compromise.** The phrase, "*standing firm in one spirit*" in verse 27 describes a Roman military formation in which the soldiers stood side by side, shoulder to shoulder. As they gathered as close as possible to each other, they held their shields up and their spears out, forming a formidable fighting machine. When we stand together, we can deflect the arrows of the enemy.

Psalm 122:3 captures this idea: "***Jerusalem built as a city that is bound firmly together.***" This is an exhortation to spiritual solidarity. We are to stand and we are to do so together, in unity. When we are united, the world will take notice as stated in Psalm 133:1: "***Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!***"

Part of our problem today is we think God is out to make each one of us happy in our individual lives. But the Bible is clear that Christianity is not a playground, but rather a battlefield. We have not been saved so we can have an easy life; we've been drafted into God's army. When the shrapnel starts flying, some of us are tempted to go AWOL because we didn't sign up for this.

Instead of standing together, some of us are splitting apart. Satan's strategy throughout church history has been to destroy unity within churches. Division is the devil's playbook and it shouldn't be surprising. The word "***devil***" comes from the Greek word *diabolos*, which can be translated as, "to divide," "to separate," or more literally, "to throw against."

The devil continues to foment racial and political tension to get us to turn against each other and he uses our disagreements and irritations to cause isolation from each other. You can feel these frictions in the Quad Cities and all around the country today. If Satan can attack the oneness believers have in Christ, our power will be diffused, we'll get discouraged, and our message will be destroyed.

The protection Jesus prays for His disciples in John 17:11 has a purpose in mind: ***“that they may be one, even as we are one.”*** In the original, this is even more forceful: *“so that they may constantly be one”* or, *“that they may keep on being one.”*

Are you filled with bitterness because you’ve refused to forgive someone for something they’ve done or said to you? It’s time to repair your relational hurts, whether they’re in your home or in the house of God. Keep short accounts with people.

Be like the young child who was overheard reciting his take on the prayer given to the disciples: *“And forgive us our trash passes, as we forgive those who have passed trash against us.”* Have you been passing trash around? Get rid of the garbage before it starts to stink.

If we don’t forgive, Hebrews 12:15 gives us a warning: ***“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”*** Will you be an answer to Jesus’ prayer by committing to unity within our faith community?

The early church experienced unity according to Acts 4:32: ***“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.”*** To choose to be united is not optional; it’s the heartbeat of Heaven and the lifeblood of the church.

We must start by standing together as soldiers but we need to do more than that. We must also strive together as a team: ***“striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”*** The word ***“striving”*** is an athletic image where we go from defense to offense. Speaking of that, is there a big game happening today? If the Packers aren’t playing, I’m not sure how it can be a big game.

The word ***“striving”*** uses the preposition *sun* (with) and is combined with the noun *athleo*, from which we get athletics. It’s noteworthy that Paul uses the preposition ***“with”*** 16 different times in this short letter, which shows he is a strong believer in teamwork! We are not just united for unity’s sake. We are put together as one for the purpose of winning others to Jesus.

How many of you remember the A-Team with Mr. T? In one episode, some criminals were captured by the A-Team and some mercenaries try to pick off each member of the team one-by-one. Things don't go as planned. I love what Hannibal says, *"Now, next time you wanna take somebody out, pal. Don't get yourself a squad, get yourself a team."*

We've been using the word "teams" at Edgewood when referring to various groups. For example, I'm one of the equippers on the pastoral team. We have the EdgeKids team, the Awana team, the EdgeStudents team, the Mainspring team, the Guest Services team, the EdgeWorship and EdgeTech teams, the EdgeWomen's team, The EdgeMen's team, the Celebrate Recovery team, and the EdgeMissions team. I like "teams" better than "committees" because a "team" focuses working collaboratively toward a goal.

Speaking of EdgeMissions, because of your joyful generosity, we are able to financially partner with about 70 global and local Go Team partners as together we live on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations. The EdgeMissions team recently interviewed Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Safe Families for Children, and One Eighty, and recommended to the deacons that we add them to our Go Team family. The deacons unanimously approved this. We'll be hearing more about how we can minister alongside them in the weeks to come.

Here's our current list of local Go Team partners:

- Child Evangelism Fellowship
- Youth Hope
- Pregnancy Resources
- Intersivity at Augie and Blackhawk
- Moody Radio Quad Cities
- Safe Families for Children
- One Eighty
- Fellowship of Christian Athletes

Along with many other national and international ministries, we also support Awana missionary Ken Krupp, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Manual and Kim Contreras with World Impact (we interviewed Kim on the 4G Podcast this week), Keep Believing Ministries with Ray Pritchard as they provide free gospel

resources including *Anchor for the Soul*, and Voice of the Martyrs as they shine the spotlight on how we can pray for persecuted believers.

We've been praying for Edgewood members Aaron and Amanda Langworthy to be fully supported so they can move to Uganda in 2025. I've also been keeping in touch with Lance Heuer who is serving in Mexico until May and Bruce and Cathy Peters as they serve at an orphanage in the Philippines for a couple more weeks. I reached out to both of them this week.

- Lance reports, *"It's going well. Jesus has been along every step of the way. I've got the weekly routine down so I'm pretty comfortable with the process. It's a marathon though, lots of challenges and new experiences happen every day. Starting tomorrow and through all next week my leader will be gone on vacation. I will be the English department! So prayers for stamina are much appreciated."* Lance worships with us via livestream on Saturday nights.
- Bruce was asked to preach this weekend and sent me an urgent message: *"Hi Brian. I need your Help!! I have been asked to give the message here on Sunday on the love of God. I start with John 3:16 and then will focus on Romans 5:13."* I sent him a couple sermon manuscripts. Bruce and Kathy report that they watch our services on livestream.

Let's pray for them now.

*It's worth it to live a worthy life.*

**3. Be courageously confident.** When we stand as one, and when we strive together, it's easy to become afraid when people come after us. Paul addresses this in verse 28: ***"And not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God."*** The word ***"frightened"*** was used to describe how a timid horse would get startled by something unexpected or unknown in its path.

I used to enjoy startling our daughters when I waited for them to come in our van. I would act like I didn't see them coming and when they least expected it, I'd lay on the horn. I enjoyed seeing how high I could get them to jump! I don't think they appreciated that. They're probably all in counseling because of me.

Paul doesn't want us to be alarmed or jumpy when we face opposition. We don't have to wig out because we're on the winning team. Actually, if people are not opposing you because of the gospel then there's something wrong. Remember what Jesus said in John 15:18: ***"If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you."***

Paul's courageous confidence is clearly stated in 2 Timothy 1:7: ***"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."*** This same sentiment is expressed in 1 Thessalonians 2:2: ***"But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict."*** Those who don't know Christ will eventually be destroyed while believers will be delivered.

*It's worth it to live a worthy life.*

**4. Contend with conflict.** In our American Christian subculture, where we often speak of blessings, prosperity and God's favor, verse 29 provides a needed corrective for us: ***"For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also to suffer for his sake."*** The Greek word translated ***"granted"*** is derived from a word meaning ***"grace"*** or ***"to do a favor for someone."*** The noun form is used for spiritual gifts and has the idea of ***"bestowing graciously."*** Notice we have been graciously granted two things: *salvation* and *suffering*.

Salvation and suffering are grace gifts from God which emanate from His sovereignty. We're quick to attribute our salvation to God's grace but slow to realize that suffering is also a gift. Do you see your problems as a privilege? Do I?

The apostles had this perspective in Acts 5:41: ***"Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."*** Some of us think we suffer because of our sins, and while we may bear the consequences of our actions, suffering is also part of God's plan for each of us, just ask the prophet Jeremiah. D.A. Carson writes: ***"If their salvation has been secured by the suffering of Christ on their behalf, their discipleship is to be demonstrated in their own suffering on His behalf."***

I think of what Paul and Barnabas taught in their new believers class in Acts 14:22: ***“Strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”*** 2 Timothy 3:12 says: ***“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*** If you’re not experiencing many problems or much persecution, could it be because you’re not living a godly life?

Friends, salvation comes from the Lord and so does suffering. When you go through a tough time it doesn’t mean that God let something get through while He was asleep. Everything comes to us through the filter of His faithfulness. Some of us are surprised and then become angry when we go through tough times. It’s almost like we say, *“Hey, what happened here? I didn’t ask for this. This isn’t what I signed up for. I have a right to be happy and healthy and whole.”*

When you’re being tossed around by trials remember the words of 1 Peter 4:12-13: ***“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ sufferings...”***

There are a number of purposes behind suffering. We could call this the grace that comes from grief or the promises that come from our problems. Go back to Philippians 4:29 and notice we suffer ***“for the sake of Christ”*** and ***“for His sake.”*** We suffer for His glory, for His greatness, and for our ultimate good.

Before missionary Karen Watson went to Iraq, she counted the cost. She left a letter with her pastor which read: *“You’re only reading this if I died.”* After she was martyred, he read the letter which included gracious words to family and friends and this simple summary of what it means to follow Christ: *“To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, His glory my reward.”*

One day, John Wesley was riding on his horse when it dawned on him that he had not been persecuted for three days. He got off his horse, got down on his knees and said, *“Maybe I’ve sinned or been disobedient.”* Just then a man on the other side of the road recognized him and heaved a rock at him. It bounced off the road, just missing Wesley’s head. He leapt to his feet and shouted, *“Thanks be to God! Everything’s all right. I still have God’s presence with me.”*

Believers in other parts of the world seem to understand the privileges of persecution better than we do. Maybe it's because they've done a better job of living out what we learned last week from Philippians 1:21: ***“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”***

Our Unreached Prayer Team prayed for our Go Team partners in South Asia on Monday night. While I won't use their names, listen to an excerpt from their most recent prayer letter.

*“We had over 4,000 Bibles and all have been given out. Muslims, Hindus and people from nominal Christian backgrounds have been taking them through the witnessing and door to door ministry. Pray we can get more Bibles...in the place we have been assembling for the last 21 years, the city officials want us to stop having church and have already given us two notices to stop having what they call is unauthorized worship. Please pray for the officials that God would change their hearts. A lot of Muslims are still against Christians having church services.”*

We are not alone in our agony. Look at verse 30: ***“Engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”*** The New Living Translation says, *“We are in this fight together...”* J.B. Phillips paraphrases it this way: *“It is now your turn to take part in the battle...”*

The Philippians remembered the hard times Paul went through at Philippi as recorded in Acts 16, and they know about his current situation. Paul tells them that their struggles are the same as his. The topic and intensity might be different, but every believer is struggling in some way. Look around. You may think you're alone in your agony. You'd be surprised to know the amount of suffering right here, right now.

Jesus is our model and He provides the power for us to persevere through our problems. I received an email some time ago from someone who described a number of unexpected trials that he and his family were going through. I love his summary statement: *“It seemed unfair. But it is completely unfair that our Savior bore all of our burdens, as well.”*

And He did all this for us. Are you ready to do the same? When problems ring your door bell, will you answer the call?

I close with some questions rooted to the main points of the passage.

1. Are you conducting yourself like Christ?
2. Are you cooperating without compromising?
3. Are you courageously confident?
4. Are you contending with conflict?

*It's worth it to live a worthy life.*

New Members - **Michael and Brenda Burns** (9am)