

Series: Side by Side
Message Title: **Striving Side by Side**
Date: Sunday, January 7, 2018
Scripture: Acts 16; Philippians 1:1-7, 27
Speaker: David H. McKinley
Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

Where do I begin a new teaching series for a New Year? How about in prison? Are any of you planning to go there this year?

We do not have to be in a prison cell to feel incarcerated, limited and shackled down. Circumstances can and do come that take away our freedom and cause us to experience bondage in life.

Most New Year resolutions are aimed at release and change! Honestly, life is not an endless sequence of opportunities, but a series of struggles. We all strive to advance and overcome the challenges and resistance to development and change.

Acts 16 is one of the most disturbing, heart-warming and moving chapters in the life of the early church. It opens with the Apostle Paul taking on a young apprentice, Timothy.

Scripture tells us this decision was positive and profitable for ministry:

“So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily” (Acts 16:5 ESV).

While traveling on, Paul experienced the “Macedonian Call.” What? Paul’s second missionary journey: arrived at the riverside, Lydia (converted), offered to house them, then a fortune teller, and finally a trip to jail.

“And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely” (Acts 16:23 ESV).

Here is where the story gets really intriguing:

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison

doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.' And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.' And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house" (Acts 16:25 ESV).

What a story! And from this story comes the greatest lesson and truth I can give you as you look toward 2018:



God's Presence > Your Circumstance

God's presence is greater than your circumstance. There is no circumstance that can or will take you beyond God's presence. The Lord is with His people. Even when we face pain, punishment, resistance, rejection, etc., the Lord is there.

“There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still.” —Corrie Ten Boom

I can’t always explain the experience, but I can’t deny God’s presence. He is side by side with us in all that comes to us.

Curiously, a big mistake was made. They accused and abused Paul as a Jew, but they failed to realize he was a Roman Citizen.

“But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, ‘Let those men go.’ And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, ‘The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace.’ But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.’ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen

the brothers, they encouraged them and departed” (Acts 16:35-40 ESV).

What a chapter! What a challenge to each of us! What happened next is of utmost importance—there was lasting impact.

The New Testament book of Philippians was written later when Paul was imprisoned again in Rome. By all evidence, what happened in Acts 16 resulted in the establishment of a church that was now thriving and one that Paul clearly loved and affirmed.

Paul opens the letter to the Philippians by describing partnership in ministry with Timothy, membership/leadership of this church, and in recognition of God’s work in the lives of His people as they move through life together.

There is positive affirmation and strong affection seen in these verses as Paul seeks to encourage perseverance in this fellowship:

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel” (Philippians 1:1-7 ESV).

Philippians 1:6 = confidence God is working in and through all the circumstances of your life. He is with you!

“Only let your manner of life [way 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” (Philippians 1:27 ESV).

Have a gospel citizenship—responsibility,

accountability, integrity, priority. How? The secret to strength, stamina and steadfast Christian living is remaining, striving, encouraging and supporting one another as we remain side by side for the gospel.

This will be the focus of our gathering, teaching, serving and living this year. This challenge and charge to remain "side by side" is rooted in the relationships Paul had with this church and the essential need we have for the community of the church in our lives.

We need each other.

We > Me

We is greater than me when we are side by side striving for the gospel. We need each other in our walk, faith and witness. We need each other because of struggles, challenges and warfare.

God gathers His church and gives us encouragement and support through one another. Paul spoke of this relationship and confidence in his life as bringing "joy."

...“always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy” (Philippians 1:4 ESV).

Because the journey of life is hard and long, we need each other to share, offer care and pray for one another.

DTR = Define the Relationship

When we speak of being side by side, what do we mean and what are the implications?

We are Side by Side as Generations.

We may be from different generations, but we all share the experiences, challenges and demands of the culture in which we live.

Generations may define perspectives and values, but they don't define people and their value.

Paul and Timothy were two men of different generations, but they were together in life.

You don't have to be old to feel challenged by change in our day, and you don't have to be young to feel unsure about what life holds for you or overlooked in what life offers you.

Our generational differences don't need to divide us, but draw us together to learn from one another.

On November 26, Andrew Skelton spoke on the subject, "Reaching Down: How to Impact the Next Generation." This is so important—intentional use of younger voices.

What is needed is the care and concern for one another that move us to connect, support and partner together as Paul and Timothy did. We are all common recipients of grace.

We are Side by Side on Location

"Philippi" was about 10 miles inland from Adriatic Sea—*Via Ignatia*, Phillip of Macedon.

In the end it was a place of God's leading in Paul's life. So we are in Augusta (by God's purpose and plan for us), a community that is growing, changing and emerging with new opportunity and diversity. We must understand where we are and see that God has gathered us together at Warren. We are in a place where the gospel can and will go forth to the ends of the earth.

We have two locations: Augusta (120 years old. . . started March 1898) and Grovetown (almost 4 years old, started on March 16, 2014). This is God's placement for us as His people. We are to focus and serve this community. It's where we live; it's who we know. Example: Nehemiah. . . next to him, at house.

We are Side by Side in Mission

Paul mentions Timothy as his partner in ministry. He mentions the "saints" at Philippi and then mentions the overseers (*episkopos*) and deacons. This was a church established, organized and focused on mission. In particular, this church gave to enable Paul.

"Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 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" (Philippians 4:14-15 ESV).

Why does the church exist? For a greater purpose than ourselves—partnership in the gospel.

“It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel... I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Philippians 1:7, 12-14 ESV).

Paul saw their prayer and, in particular, their gift as enabling him to advance the gospel. Let's not make it any harder than we have to today. This church, Warren Baptist Church, is stronger and better when we are together, striving for the sake of the gospel. How do we? How can we? Where will we serve and invest for the gospel?

We exist to advance the kingdom of God, not our kingdom. God is not interested in serving our petty needs, but He invites you and me to come together to share and to fulfill His

great purpose—the redemption of the lost to know, love, serve and follow Christ Jesus.

This has been such a strength in our ministry at Warren—involvement, investment, and engagement. As we get larger, it can be easier for us to think automatic. Easy for us to get into the that’s-not-my-job mentality.

“There were four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody’s job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn’t do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have.”

Partnerships are “a way of life” for us—working together, working side by side to honor and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice this is the focus of the writing in Philippians 1:1-2—the Lord Jesus Christ!

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:1-2 ESV).

True growth does not take place sitting and studying together, but when we are striving side by side. I love the posture of this. It is togetherness, unity and community.

We are Side by Side Till Completion

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6 ESV).

This is a great verse to memorize. You and I are both a work in progress. We cannot ignore the need for encouragement and support till we come to the completion of this journey called *life* in faith.

PBPGINFWMY – Please Be Patient God Is Not Finished With Me Yet!

But the Christian life is not a do-it-yourself

project. God is working in us and God is at work in us together!

Last Monday evening, the Georgia Bulldogs made Rose Bowl history when they defeated Oklahoma and advanced to the National Championship. It was one of the most exciting and enjoyable games I have watched in many years. Why? They were striving side by side. The Bulldogs were down 31-17 at the half, but they came back! The Bulldogs then tied in the 4th quarter and went into overtime, not once, but twice! They blocked a field goal attempt and then Sony Michel ran into the end zone. Why? They did not quit. They kept striving side by side together.

“It’s not about me, it’s not about him [Nick Chubb], it’s about what we can do together.”
—Sony Michel, UGA Running Back

I have two confidences for us as we sit side by side today:

1. **God’s Presence > Your Circumstance**
2. **We > Me** (side by side rather than standing alone)