

## Philippians 4:1-9

### *Be Church by Standing Firm...Together*

**Main idea:** We are one body, and individually members of it. Be one body.

This is a poem by e.e. cummings called, "l(a)".

#### **["l(a)", a poem by e.e. cummings]**

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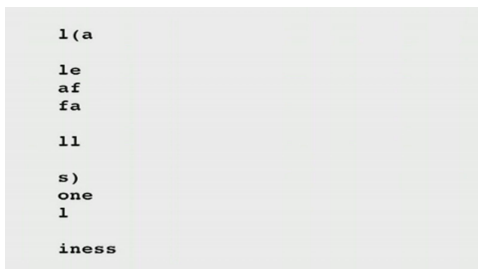
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Have any of you seen this poem before? Can any of you figure it out? Maybe this will help.

#### **[Animation of l(a)]**



You see, if you compress all the letters together, you find that there's a short sentence which reads "a leaf falls" embedded within the word "loneliness." And when the words and even letters are broken up the way that they are in the poem, it gives the reader a kind of uneasy feeling, much like a leaf dying and falling off a tree, all by itself, carried by the wind, and that's supposed to convey the idea and depression of loneliness.

Have you ever felt that? If you're like most people, at some point in your life, you've felt utterly alone.<sup>1</sup> Or maybe you feel that way this morning. If so, there's good news. Look around. You're not alone. And I don't just say that because there are other people here. I say it because probably everyone here at some point has felt alone, just like you. You see, part of the good news is that Jesus brings us together in Him.<sup>2</sup>

That's what we're going to be talking about this morning, so please turn with me to Philippians 4 as we near the end of our study through the letter to the church of Philippi. Throughout this series, we've been looking at

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://x.co/LonelyPoll>

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 2:17-22

what makes a church, a church. It's not just that we come together and sing some songs and hear a sermon, but among other things, that we grow in faith together.<sup>3</sup> And that we serve together.<sup>4</sup> And that we also extend an invitation to all the world that they also might receive Jesus and join us as we worship God, together.<sup>5</sup>

You see, our togetherness really is a crucial aspect of being a church.<sup>6</sup> That often gets lost as we think about what it means to live as a Christian. Sure, we think about going to church, and giving to church, but according to the Bible, as we've seen, church isn't about where we're to go, but about who we're to be.<sup>7</sup>

The word translated "church" literally means "called out ones."<sup>8</sup> As disciples of Jesus, we are called out from the world, so that we have a new identity in Jesus Christ: we are children of God.<sup>9</sup> That means that the things that used to define us, such as our jobs, and status, and even family, should no longer be the defining characteristics of our lives, but rather Jesus Himself.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, how we live in every area ought to reflect that Jesus is our Lord.

But that's hard, isn't it? We know that we ought to obey God, but so often we go back to obeying our own desires. We know that we ought to find joy in Christ, but day after day, we go back to seeking joy in sin.

Many of you work or have worked in ungodly atmospheres. Your coworkers constantly degraded you for your belief in God. Or maybe that's your family. Maybe your own family tempts you to gossip, or to hate others, or even to turn your back on following God completely. In these situations, and so many more, it's hard to keep the faith and live it out!

So Paul encourages us. Verse 1.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. (Philippians 4:1)

Paul starts by reminding the church just how much he loves them. And he expresses his love for them no less than five times in this one verse: "whom I love," and "long for," my "joy" and "crown," and "my beloved." You see, Paul isn't giving them a command just to be bossy or to insist on a certain way of life. He's giving them the command because he loves them.

That's why God gives us commands in the Bible. It's because He loves us.<sup>11</sup> It's true that God deserves all our faithfulness, and devotion, and praise, and that things are right and wrong, and that we ought to do what's right, but God doesn't give us all these commands in the Bible just to boss us around. God only commands what's good for you.<sup>12</sup> He's not trying to steal your happiness. He wants you to have the utmost joy in life and eternity, and that can only be found in walking with Him.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 1:6

<sup>4</sup> Philippians 1:3-5

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 2:10-11

<sup>6</sup> Acts 2:42

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 1:1 (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:2)

<sup>8</sup> ἐκκλησία is a combination of the noun κλησία meaning "calling" or "called ones" with the prefix εκ- meaning "out of."

<sup>9</sup> John 1:12

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:17

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 7:9

<sup>12</sup> Romans 8:28

<sup>13</sup> John 10:10

So Paul commands us: my beloved, stand firm.

We often take this kind of thing as a personal command and stop there. We understand it as encouragement to stand firm as individual believers. We think about our own personal faith, and how we ought cling to faith, and not lose faith, and even share our own personal faith with others. And that's all good. But Paul's command here isn't merely to individuals, but to the collective church. He writes, "my brothers...stand firm."

The imagery is that of an army that marches into battle together, and then once they arrived at the battleground, they stopped and planted their feet and stood firm as one group, one people, the king's army.

In the same way, we have the charge not just to stand firm as individuals, but as a church. As a group of people who all share the same faith. We're one body, and God calls us to function as one body.<sup>14</sup>

So many things get in the way of that. We can often get so focused on our own lives, whether with problems or even pleasures, that we can neglect being a functioning part of God's church. So Paul wrote to the church of Philippi, "brothers...[all of you together]...stand firm." In other words, have your feet planted in the gospel in such a way that it's settled in your mind and in your life who you serve. But this isn't just supposed to happen as individual believers, but collectively as a church. We, as a church, ought to stand firm together.

So in the context of standing firm as a church, Paul names five very practical things that we can do in order to be living out the gospel together. The first is simply to be united in our faith. Verse 2.

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. (Philippians 4:2)

Apparently, these two women were having such a disagreement that Paul felt it was necessary to beg them in his letter to get along.

I once saw a guy almost fall off a bridge. I was right beside him and I caught his hand just in time and said, "Hold on to me, help will come soon!" I said, "Are you a Christian?" He said, "Yes, I'm a Christian." I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?" He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me, too! What denomination?" He said, "Baptist." I said, "Me, too! American Baptist or Southern Baptist?" He said, "Southern Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Conservative Southern Baptist or Liberal Southern Baptist?"

He said, "Conservative Southern Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Conservative Southern Baptist using the Baptist Faith and Message 1963, or Conservative Southern Baptist using the Baptist Faith and Message 2000?" He said, "Conservative Southern Baptist using the Baptist Faith and Message 1963." I said, "Die, heretic!" And I let go of his hand.

Now, of course, that didn't happen. But it points out how even when we have disagreements, we ought to put aside our personal preferences, and even sometimes our convictions on lesser matters for the sake of loving each other and standing firm together.<sup>15</sup> That's what Paul encouraged these two women to do. And notice how he did that. He entreated both of them to agree. "I entreat Euodia AND I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord."

Often when there's a disagreement, one person is right, and one person is wrong. Or at the very least, one person is more in the right and one person is more in the wrong. But when it came to the dispute between

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:20

<sup>15</sup> Romans 14

Euodia and Syntyche, we don't know what their dispute was over, or who was more in the right, because Paul didn't really even care to mention it. He simply reminded them that since they are both in the Lord, having faith in Jesus, then they need to love one another and be united in their faith.

It's so easy to fall into disagreements with genuine believers, simply for the fact that we're all still human sinners.<sup>16</sup> And absolutely no one is immune to this kind of temptation.<sup>17</sup> According to verse 3, these women were apparently even fellow workers with Paul in some of his missionary journeys. Verse 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.  
(Philippians 4:3)

It can be easy to name-call and demonize people as you have a disagreement with them. But notice how Paul tried to help these women work through their disagreement. In verse 1, he reminded them that they were both beloved. In verse 2, he reminded them that they were both in the Lord. In verse 3, he showed appreciation for both of them serving alongside himself, and rejoiced that their names were written in the book of life. Paul wasn't questioning their faith. He was reminding them just how much they have in common in their faith, so they should be able to stand firm together, even despite disagreements on lesser things.

Church, if we're going to stand firm, we need to be united. That's the first thing. The second is that together, we would rejoice. Verse 4.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Philippians 4:4)

Because we have so much in common as Christians, we are to rejoice at all times. Always. When things are going good, and when things are going bad. This is so important that Paul emphasizes it by saying it twice in the same verse: "again I will say, rejoice!"

I don't think I've ever met them at this church, but I think in every other church I've been a part of, there's always been a Debbie Downer or Negative Ned. You know who I'm talking about. It's the person who is always pessimistic, and never content, and seems to always be sharing their opinion about how bad everything is. They could win a billion dollars, but then they'll just say, "Yeah, but I'll only keep a measly few million after taxes."

God didn't send Jesus so that you could go around all the time with a scowl on your face. No, we're to rejoice! We're to have joy, whether living in plenty or in want, we can always rejoice.<sup>18</sup>

But the command to rejoice doesn't just mean generally being a happy person. Rejoicing is to be done, it says, "in the Lord." In other words, have joy at all times that Jesus saves you by grace.<sup>19</sup> This is good news of great joy!<sup>20</sup> You can have joy at all times that God is good and fulfills His promises.<sup>21</sup> And allow your joy to be

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<sup>16</sup> Romans 7:21-23

<sup>17</sup> James 3:2

<sup>18</sup> Philippians 4:12

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 2:8

<sup>20</sup> Luke 2:10

<sup>21</sup> Ezekiel 12:28

extremely evident in your life, so that you rejoice with your church, and with your family, and with everyone you meet.<sup>22</sup>

The third way that we're to stand firm together is in verse 5.

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; (Philippians 4:5)

The word "reasonableness" in this verse refers to a kind of gracious humility that ought to characterize our lives as believers in Christ. Jesus said that they would know that we are His disciples by our love.<sup>23</sup> Our love for one another ought to be a constant witness to the world that Jesus is our Savior. But so often, our churches are characterized by criticisms and arguments. So Paul reminded the church of Philippi that "the Lord is at hand."

You know, sometimes you might hear someone say, "God is watching" as a threat in order to deter someone from sin. But I don't think Paul meant "the Lord is at hand" as a threat. I think Paul was reminding the church of God's loving presence. As a believer in Jesus, you're never alone.<sup>24</sup> You might still sometimes have feelings of loneliness, as we all do, because of broken relationships with others, but if you've received Jesus, then He's always with you.

By saying, "the Lord is at hand," Paul was giving us an even stronger reminder to stand firm in the Lord, and to agree in the Lord, and to rejoice in the Lord always. In other words, how can we harbor bitterness toward one another when God, who's always with us, shows us such amazing grace? We all sin and fall short of God's glory,<sup>25</sup> and yet even in our state of sinfulness, God demonstrated His love for us in sending Jesus to die for us.<sup>26</sup> He humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross,<sup>27</sup> so that you would be forgiven in Him.

So in the same way, we ought to have a gracious humility toward one another. And this is a way that we stand firm together: that we would be absolutely steadfast in showing one another grace.

The fourth way that we stand firm together actually comes with a promise. Verse 6.

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. (Philippians 4:6-7)

We ought to stand firm together in prayer. Prayer helps us to experience the peace of God, so that we're not anxious about anything, but rather that we're trusting God with everything.

This is why we pray so much together. In each church worship service, we usually pray together at least 6 or 7 times. It's an important part of being a church, because while it's important to serve, and sing, and give, and teach, it's through the simplicity of prayer that we most see that Christianity is not merely a religion, but a relationship.<sup>28</sup> It's a relationship with Almighty God.

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<sup>22</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

<sup>23</sup> John 13:35

<sup>24</sup> Joshua 1:9

<sup>25</sup> Romans 3:23

<sup>26</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>27</sup> Philippians 2:8

<sup>28</sup> Revelation 3:20

I heard that someone once asked the pastor R.C. Sproul:

### What is missing from the Christian church?

And he simply responded:

### "God!" - R.C. Sproul

We can get so caught up in doing all the things that we want to do, or even think that we need to do, but more than anything, we need to be overwhelmed by the awesome power and glory of God, who loves us and invites us to have a real and vibrant relationship with Him.<sup>29</sup>

Jesus said that His house would be called a house of prayer.<sup>30</sup> And I don't think He was ultimately talking about a building, but about us, His people. We're His body, the temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>31</sup>

So, church, don't neglect to pray together.

Lifeway conducted a poll a few years back to see what Americans prayed for.

### [Lifeway Poll on Prayer]

#### WHAT DO AMERICANS PRAY FOR?

Winning the lottery	21%
Success in something you put almost no effort in	20%
No one to find out a bad thing you had done	15%
Your favorite team to win a game	13%
Bad things to happen to a bad person	9%
Finding a good parking spot	7%
Not getting caught speeding	7%
Success in something you knew wouldn't please God	5%
Someone to get fired	5%

Among other things, they found that of Americans who pray, 20% pray for success in things they put almost no effort in. Fifteen percent pray that no one would find out about a bad thing they did. Thirteen percent pray for their favorite sports team to win, and 7% pray that they would find a good parking spot and that they would not get caught while speeding.<sup>32</sup>

And I'm not telling which, but I've prayed for some of these things. Maybe you have, too.

Now, I'm not trying to discourage us from praying, but is this what we should be praying for? I'm not sure this is what Paul had in mind when he told us to pray without ceasing.<sup>33</sup> Pray for the lost!<sup>34</sup> Pray for your brother and sister in Christ! Pray that they and you would stand firm in the faith, and then trust that no matter what happens, God loves you and will take you to where you need to be.

<sup>29</sup> Zephaniah 3:17

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 21:13

<sup>31</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

<sup>32</sup> Source: <https://lifewayresearch.com/2014/10/01/americansprayforfriendsandfamily-2/>

<sup>33</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:17

<sup>34</sup> Romans 10:1

The last way that Paul names for us to stand firm together is in verses 8 and 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. (Philippians 4:8-9)

Many of you are probably familiar with verse 8, as it's a great verse to memorize in order to remind yourself to stop dwelling on all the junk that we usually think about, and to instead think about good things: things that are true and honorable and just. In other words, dwell on Jesus and His word. Jesus is the truth,<sup>35</sup> and His word is true.

But maybe you've never thought about how this verse isn't just for you as an individual, but for us as a church. As a church, we're to stand firm together by thinking about God's truth together. And while I hope my sermon every week helps you to do that, I think an even more effective way to do this together is through our Sunday morning and Wednesday night Bible studies. When we're broken up into smaller groups, we're able to pray together more specifically for each person's requests, and to study God's word together, each one being able to ask questions and share what they've learned as they've studied, so that all of us are built up in the Lord, and we help one another to stand firm not just separately, but together, in the Lord.<sup>36</sup>

You see, standing firm together as a church in these ways invites the peace of God upon us. So many churches and Christians have constant disputes because they don't stand firm together, which includes being united in faith, and rejoicing together, having a gracious humility, praying together, and dwelling on the good things of God. Because when we come together, not just physically, but in spirit, then we find that we're not alone. When two or three are gathered in His name, Jesus is right here with us.<sup>37</sup>

Two times in this passage, we're promised the peace of God. The second time is at the end of verse 9:

practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9b)

Listen, none of the commands that Paul has given us this morning are easy, and we're not going to be perfect at doing any of them. But Paul didn't expect us to be perfect at them. He just encouraged us to practice them. Practice being united, and rejoicing, and showing grace to one another, and praying together, and thinking about God's truth together, and if you just practice these things, you'll experience God's peace like never before.

But here's the thing: you can only experience God's peace when you have a relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul started this chapter by addressing the church as brothers. He's talking to his family in Christ. And if you've never received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then you're not yet part of His family. So I invite you this morning to trust in Him, and all your sins will be forgiven, and you'll immediately have peace with God, and you'll never be alone again.

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<sup>35</sup> John 14:6

<sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:26

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 18:20