

Nov 11, 2017

# Philippians 4:10-23

## Discipleship 101: Disciples who Suffer

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Have you ever finished reading a book and wondered, what did I just read? I have lots of books on my bookshelf that I know I've read, but I have trouble remembering what they are about. To try to solve this, I've become a lot more **interactive** with my books. Now when I read, I **underline** and try to paraphrase points in the **margins**, writing down a word or two that will remind me what it's about.

Today we're wrapping up our sermon series in the book of Philippians, **Discipleship 101**, and maybe you're wondering, what was this series about? Today I want to give us the opportunity to review and take some notes to help us **remember** the book of Philippians and what we learned.

Our last verses, Philippians 4:10-23, serve as the **conclusion** of our letter. In them, like you would expect in **books** we read today, Paul wraps up his message by **re-emphasizing** some of the main themes of his letter. One of the themes we find throughout Philippians, and **hinted** at here, is **suffering in service** to Christ.

### **We are suffering servants. (Phil 4:11-13)**

How did Paul open his letter to the church at Philippi?

**Philippians 1:1a** Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus... (NIV®)

And then just a few verses Paul mentions he is in "chains" (1:7, 13, 17). He's under house arrest in Rome because of his service to Christ. Suffering in service to Christ runs throughout this whole letter.

**Philippians 1:29** For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, (NIV®)

**Philippians 2:17** But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. (NIV®)

This extends not only to Paul, but to two examples of suffering servants, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Paul says Timothy has **served** with him and Epaphroditus got **sick** and almost **died** to serve Paul (Phil 2:22, 30). You would think that Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus would all be **alienated**, and not want to be disciples anymore. But in our passage today, Paul says God has taught him to be **content** no matter what.

**Philippians 4:11b-13** ...for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (NIV®)

Paul has learned the secret whether he has nothing or more than he needs, whether in **happy** service or **suffering** service. He can do it as Jesus Christ gives him power. The word for strength is "endynamoō" — which one commentator said is where we get our word for "**dynamite**." The town I grew up in once had to replace the **sewage line** in our yard, and to do so, they used explosives to literally blow up half of our yard. The blast was so powerful they had to cover the dynamite with blankets of tires.

Do you realize what kind of power lives in you? If you know Jesus, the power of God, who created dynamite, lives in you. God gives us his power to persevere and keep on doing good in the face of adversity, persecution, and suffering. We will suffer as servant-disciples of Christ.

There is no more clear and recent example of servants of Christ suffering for him than **First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs**, Texas. I hate it that a man broken by sin let it become master over him and he murdered 26 innocent people (Gen 4:7). But I am so in awe of Farida Brown, 73 years old, who was a member of the church for a decade, and was shot four times in her legs. And as she lay hiding in the back of the sanctuary, she held another woman's hand, "assuring her that it would be over soon, that she was headed for heaven." **Do you believe** that God granted to Farida to not only believe in Christ, but also to suffer for him?

On Wednesday night we had a last-minute prayer time for the shooting in Texas. I'm so grateful for those who prayed against fear and for strength to keep reaching out to our community. If the Lord wills it, are you willing to suffer for him? Do you believe his strength is enough for you? If you trust Christ, you don't need to live in fear, and if he calls you to suffer, he will be right there **with you** (Isa 53).

**Philippians 3:10-11** I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. (NIV®)

Christ suffered first, he died, and rose again. And any who trust in him, no matter what they suffer, will one day **rise again** too. This means **the martyrs of Sutherland Springs** are with Christ, and we will get to enjoy eternal life with them. *We are suffering servants*. But this is hard. How can we have enough **courage**?

## **We are suffering servants who pray. (Phil 4:14, 17-20)**

Paul begins and ends Philippians in prayer. Prayer is bookends or sandwich bread for the rest of the book.

- **Philippians 1:3-11** — Paul prays gratefully, joyfully, confidently, and affectionately for love, discernment, purity, and fruit for the Philippians.
- **Philippians 4:6-7** Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (NIV®)

Paul **emphasizes** prayer by saying words for prayer **four times** (prayer, petition, thanksgiving, present your requests), and promising that God's **peace** will come to any who pray. We receive courage to be disciples who suffer and serve through prayer, by calling out to God for his **strength**. Prayer is calmly **opening your hand** and asking God to put a **stick of dynamite** in it, his power. When we pray together as a church, it's like playing **pass-the-baton** with a stick of dynamite.

When we suffer, or we see **others** suffer, God calls us to pray. We have a way for you to pray at the end of this service for FBC Sutherland Springs. In the back of the room we've set up a table where you can write a note to the church. After the service, sometime during fellowship time, please **sign the card** and **say a prayer** for the families and friends of those who died. I printed out a list of all the victims so you can learn more about them as you pray for their families, friends, and the church.

Now Paul doesn't pray once more in Philippians 4:14-19. Instead, I think he gives us an example of answered prayer. Back in Philippians 1, Paul prays this.

**Philippians 1:9, 11** And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight... 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (NIV®)

Paul prayed this for the Philippians, and already he seems to say he is seeing God answer his prayers. Notice some of the similar vocabulary Paul uses in his thank you, which here is in the ESV.

**Philippians 1:14, 17, 20** Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble... 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit... 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. (ESV)

Paul prayed that their **whole lives** would bear the fruit of righteousness, and their compassionate gift to Paul shows that they are **bearing** this **fruit**. Their whole lives are bringing **glory** to God. *We are suffering servants who pray, and you know what, God answers our prayers.*

But if Paul were to write a letter to the church at Westford, would he say we are a church full of prayer? Would he look at us and say, “One of their core values is prayer, so they must be doing it.” We made prayer one of our core values not because we are doing it, but because we know we must do it.

In the book, ***Old Paths, New Power*** John Dickerson asks a question about the American church...

Question: Why is the wealthiest church in world history declining in both size and cultural influence?

...Somewhere along the way, unintentionally and gradually, we moved our feet of faith away from desperate dependence on the resurrection of Christ, away from the Holy Spirit as our only source of power, away from desperate times of prayer.<sup>1</sup>

The only one who can **sustain** us in serving each other and serving this community and the only one who can empower us to persevere in suffering is the **Holy Spirit**. And the way we **access** his power is through prayer. *Disciples are suffering servants who pray.* Paul’s next theme has to do with how we live our lives.

## **We are suffering servants who pray and who live unified, humble, and joyful lives. (Phil 4:10, 15-16)**

So if prayer is the bread of the sandwich, or the bookends, what is the **spread**? What’s in this sandwich? At the end of chapter one, Paul calls believers to live differently, for disciples to live a certain way.

**Philippians 1:27a** Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. (NIV®)

The word “conduct yourselves” means “to be a citizen.” Where are disciples citizens of? **Philippians 3:20** says, “our citizenship is in heaven.” So Philippians 1:27 is saying, “Live like you’re citizens of God’s kingdom.” So how can we do that? There are three ways:

- 1) **Unity** (Phil 1:26-30): Do you remember some of the issues in the early church? The Judaizers, who claim to be Jewish Christians, are saying everyone who wants to be a Christian also has to be circumcised (Phil 3:2). And two women, Euodia and Syntyche, are pulling in opposite directions (Phil 4:2). So I think these issues are some of the reasons why Paul calls for unity in chapter one.

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<sup>1</sup> Henderson, Daniel. *Old Paths, New Power: Awakening Your Church through Prayer and the Ministry of the Word* (pp. 25-26). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

**Philippians 1:27b** ...whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel (NIV®)

- 2) **Humility** (Phil 2:1-11): Then Paul calls for humility in the church people, calling them to have the same mindset of Christ Jesus (v. 5).

**Philippians 2:3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, (NIV®)

And then who does he give as the **supreme example** of humility? Jesus Christ, who left the glories and praise of heaven, became a man, and then died. Do you see how low he goes? If Jesus, the king of kings, can humble himself that much, so can I. What's the third ingredient?

- 3) **Joy** (Phil 2:12-18): Instead of complaining and bickering and arguing, Paul calls for joy.

**Philippians 2:14, 17b-18** Do everything without grumbling or arguing... 17b ...I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. (NIV®)

And how does Paul tie chapter four's closing back to all of that? He calls them to **rejoice** in verse 10 and gives thanks for them giving him a financial donation in verses 15-16. The Philippians are **demonstrating** their unity with Paul, their humility to count him as more important than themselves, and their joy in giving.

Today we recited our **membership covenant** and welcomed in our very first round of church members. Our covenant is a **promise** we make to God, each other, and ourselves to live worthy of the gospel. There's a line about "protecting the **unity** of the church" and other lines expressing **humility**, being quick to ask for and receive forgiveness. In some ways, our covenant is putting into a modern language what it means to live as citizens of the **kingdom** of God in our **local church** in Westford MA. When immigrants are approved for citizenship, one of their final steps is to take the **Oath of Allegiance**, in which they renounce ties to all other countries and promise to serve and protect the United States. They're promising to live as citizens of our country. In our covenant, we're promising to live as citizens of God's kingdom the **outpost** of Westford. *We are suffering servants who pray and who live unified, humble, and joyful lives.* Now let's look to the last few verses to see **who** it's all about.

## **We are suffering servants who pray, who live unified, humble, and joyful lives, and who find our all in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:21-23)**

Finding our all in Christ is really the big theme of Philippians. It's the **meat** of the sandwich, the core ingredient. Paul mentions Christ Jesus twice in the last three verses. Did you know in four short chapters, Paul uses the name Jesus 22 times, and the title Christ 37 times? In the Greek, Paul says "in Christ" 10 times and "in the Lord" 9 times. And he uses the word "gospel" another 9 times. Paul is obsessed with Jesus. He is **obsessed** with finding his all in Christ.

**Philippians 1:6** being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (NIV®)

**Philippians 1:21** For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (NIV®)

**Philippians 3:8-9a** What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ... (NIV®)

Paul isn't content in his hardship and suffering because he has enough **food**. He's not content because the Philippians gave him **money** to help out. Paul is content because he has found his all **in Christ Jesus**. That means Jesus Christ has changed everything about him, his outlook on life, his fears and hopes, his joys and sorrows. He finds his meaning, his purpose, and his identity in Christ. He has found a relationship with Christ Jesus, and that is enough.

If you're not a Christian, today's sermon was probably a little bit weird for you. Maybe you came here thinking Christianity is just about getting out of hell. That if you just **say a prayer**, you're good to go. Prayer is certainly part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus, but Jesus also says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt 16:24) Being a Christian, a disciple, is about laying down every part of your life before Jesus.

***We are suffering servants who pray, who live unified, humble, and joyful lives, and who find our all in Christ Jesus.***

Maybe some of you watched the news conference this week when Pastor Frank and his wife Sherri addressed reporters. They had just lost their 14-year old daughter, Annabelle. After Sherri read their statement, Pastor Frank said this, "...lift this thing in Christ. Everything is in Christ."

A reporter then asked him, "What do you tell the other grieving families?"

He said, "I'm still working on that, but thank you" before adding, "Christ is the one who is going to be lifted up... You lean into what you don't understand. You lean into the Lord. ... Whatever life brings to you, lean on the Lord rather than your own understanding. I don't understand, but I know my God does." *We are suffering servants who pray, who live unified, humble, and joyful lives, and who find our all in Christ Jesus.*

*Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).*

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