

Stand and Strive
Preview Service #1
Philippians 1:27–30

It is a great joy and privilege to preach God’s word to you. I have waited a long time for this. Even though the culmination of the last year of church planting efforts won’t arrive until next Sunday when we get to covenant together and eat the Lord’s Supper together as a church for the first time, still, this is a sweet blessing from the Lord, and made all the sweeter for the difficulty in getting here! On the 29th, Pastor Andy Naselli from the Christ the King Church will deliver a Charge for us. Lord willing, on April 05, Easter Sunday, I will preach one more sermon from Philippians before we move on to worship as part of a much larger series on God’s Design. That will launch us into our normal mode and pattern of worship and preaching for 2026. I view this preview Sunday as a culture-building Sunday, and the two sermons I’m preaching from Philippians as culture-building sermons. These are opportunities to begin laying the foundation stones for Risen King Church. What will we be about? What will characterize us? Those questions have to do with much more than the sermon—our entire service and our fellowship before and after all have to do with the same goal—but the sermon does contribute to it. And I chose to preach Philippians 1:27–30 this week and Philippians 2:1–11 on Easter. Why *this* passage? Here it is in a nutshell: Philippians 2:1–11 provides the fuel for unselfish, humble, *and ambitious* kingdom work based in Christian charity. We want all of Christ for all of life for all of the Chippewa Valley. We are about the disciple-making business in Mondovi, and we hope that King Jesus will grant such faith and repentance to this Valley by his Spirit that it would become known as a Christian stronghold that gladly and wholly—from community leaders to university faculty to farmers to educators to stay-at-home mothers—bows the knee to Christ. *That* is a generational ambition that requires *faith-filled, joyful, Psalm-fortified, family-oriented hard work*. Philippians 2:1–11 provides the fuel that we need for that hard work.¹

¹ Manner of life worthy of the gospel (citizenship language)
This Christian manner of living that is worthy of the gospel yields . . .

- a. Standing firm in one spirit
 - i. By striving side by side for the faith of the gospel
 - ii. By striving fearlessly
 - b. The knowledge of opponents/enemies of the gospel that they will be destroyed, and you will be saved.
- The basis for your fearless, side-by-side striving is that God has given you both the pain/suffering you experience and the faith that saves you.

Main idea: **Stand firm in one spirit by striving fearlessly for a life worthy of the gospel in the surety of God’s sovereignty.**

And Philippians 1:27–30, our passage for this afternoon, provides the ethos that characterizes the healthy and effective kingdom outpost that we pray that Risen King Church will be. It gives us the underlying convictions which must stabilize a church if it is going to endure and remain upright for the long haul, over generations, where there will surely be difficulties, obstacles, and adversaries that try to uproot what God has planted.

Read it with me:

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, 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. 29 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, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

In this passage, God gives us two convictions that will stabilize and govern Risen King Church so that she builds and endures and prevails for generations to the glory of God:

1. We must be rooted in the conviction that **faith** is a gift from God.
2. Moreover, we must be rooted in the conviction that **suffering and persecution** are a gift from God.

These two convictions produce a people of a particular character. Namely, they produce **a *fearless* people who work hard together for the faith of the gospel.**

Those two convictions and that ethos flow directly from the text. Let me show you how I got there.

Look again at verse 27. Paul exhorts us to adopt a manner of life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ. Or the NLT translates it: “Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven...” Christians are not merely individuals. They have been caught up into the kingdom of God, which has its own culture, its own goals, its own glory, its own hierarchy, and its own citizens. The lives of these citizens are to be *worthy*. Worthy of what? Worthy of the gospel of the risen Christ. Why? Because it is this gospel that is the foundation stone for the kingdom. Therefore, we aim to conduct ourselves as kingdom citizens in a manner that is worthy of this gospel.

Now look at the second half of verse 27. We are wondering: *What does it look like to live such a life?* Paul doesn't answer that question directly. He gives us something better: He shows us what a life worthy of the gospel *yields*. What does it produce? Do you see that? Live a life "worthy of the gospel of Christ (verse 27), *so that* I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit". If you are living a worthy life, then it will produce this effect: The Philippians believers will stand firm in one spirit, and Paul will hear about it.

In other words, the evidence that you are living as a citizen worthy of the gospel is that you are standing firm in one spirit with other believers. Now, Paul continues to shape and color what it is to stand firm in one spirit. He does it step by step in the last part of verse 27. Look at it again:

1. Live worthy of the gospel . . .
2. What does that look like? "...standing firm in one spirit..."
3. How do we stand firm in one spirit?
 - a. "...with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,"
 - b. "...and not frightened in anything by your opponents."

A life worthy of the gospel entails standing firm together in one spirit by striving side by side for the faith of the gospel fearlessly. The effect it produces is astonishing: When believers strive side by side fearlessly, they give a clear, flashing-neon sign to their enemies: You will be destroyed by God, but we will be saved by God. The second half of verse 28: "This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God."

The question is, where does this come from? I want to live as a citizen of heaven whose life is worthy of the gospel! I want to strive fearlessly, even when I am surrounded by lions and screaming, blue-haired enemies of the gospel! But how? Where does such courage and zeal come from? Verse 29: "**For**—this is the basis for your fearless striving alongside other believers—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."

I count two gifts from God in this verse:

1. He has granted to you and me *to believe in Christ*. Do you see that?! Faith is itself a gift! We are wholehearted Calvinists, and happy ones at that! That is, we acknowledge our utter and total depravity—our emptiness, deadness, powerlessness to do or desire any good—apart from the gracious, saving work of God in Christ and by the Spirit. We were carcasses, decaying by the side of the road. It was not until the Spirit of God regenerated and renewed us, filling our decaying hands with fresh blood and restoring our fingers with sound flesh, that we raised our hands, now warm and living, to heaven in desperate faith: Please! Give me life! Please justify

me! Apart from you, I die! I love how the London Baptist Confession of Faith from 1689 describes saving faith. Let me read parts of the 14th chapter to you, it is beautiful:

- a. 1689 LBCF, 14.1–3, “The grace of faith, by which the elect are enabled to believe so that their souls are saved, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts.¹ Faith is ordinarily produced by the ministry of the Word.² By this same ministry and by the administration of baptism and the Lord’s supper, prayer, and other means appointed by God, faith is increased and strengthened. By this faith Christians believe to be true everything revealed in the Word, recognizing it as the authority of God himself... the principal acts of saving faith focus directly on Christ—accepting, receiving, and resting upon him alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace. This faith may exist in varying degrees so that it may be either weak or strong.¹¹ Yet even in its weakest form, it is different in kind or nature (like all other saving graces) from the faith and common grace of temporary believers.¹² Therefore, faith may often be attacked and weakened, but it gains the victory.”

Do you see it here? Faith is a gift. It comes from God’s grace (“the grace of faith”), not from our willpower. But though it is a gift, it is not passive. Pastor Doug Wilson puts it this way: “The faith that God gives is alive from the moment that God first gives it. It is not a dead, inert faith that receives justification, and then somehow comes to life after that. It is alive from the get-go. And this living faith, at each stage, does what it was given in order to do. And the very first thing it does is rest and receive. That obedient resting and receiving is the instrument of justification.”²

That is to say, God woke up my dead carcass by his Spirit (that’s regeneration), and my regenerated heart believes on Christ—receives him, rests upon him—and thereby, this revived carcass is justified. The **gift** of regeneration wakes up the dead man. The **gift** of faith compels him, now awake, to rest in and receive the righteousness of Christ. And God graciously counts this faith as righteousness, which is the **gift** of justification.

This is glorious! And it strengthens our spirits for the hard path before us. This saving gift of faith is the first conviction that will stabilize our church so that we might minister joyfully and faithfully for generations, even through persecution and suffering. But how??

The word that Paul uses in verse 27 grabs your attention, especially in light of all the gifts that we’ve just been discussing. He says that he wants us to “*strive*” side by side for the faith of the gospel. He wants us to struggle, to wrestle alongside one another *for the faith* of the gospel. He wants us to *work*

² Doug Wilson, “Justifying Faith Has No Side Hustles,” *Blog & Mablog*, <https://dougwils.com/the-church/living-faith-has-no-side-hustles.html>.

hard, to spend ourselves for the faith of the gospel. But isn't it a gift?? Oh, it is! Hallelujah, the faith of the gospel is one of God's most precious gifts! It is precisely because you know that faith has been given to you that you can *strive* for it. This assurance from Philippians 1:29 is the same assurance that God gave to Joshua as they came to the high walls of Jericho: "I have given Jericho into your hand". Therefore . . . What? Do nothing? Sit around and watch? No! I have given Jericho into your hand, now go march around the city! (Josh 6:2-3) It is the same assurance that God gave to the prince, Jonathan, when he and his armor-bearer came to the camp of the Philistines: "Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, 'Come up after me, for the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel.' Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, and his armor-bearer with him. And they fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer killed them after him" (1 Sam 14:12-13). The LORD has given them into our hands, *and for that reason*, we stand and fight with all our might! Remember what the Confession says, "[True saving faith] may often be attacked and weakened, but it gains the victory." God calls us to *strive*, to work hard, to wrestle, to deny our flesh, to take up our cross, to make our calling and election sure, to take hold of God's grace, to obey his commands that lead to life and reject the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He calls us to endure, to prevail, to climb high mountains even while our bones ache, and we gasp for breath. And your power for striving in this way is the assurance that God has given you the gift of saving faith that must endure to the end, must prevail, must have the victory. Not because you are strong, but because the God who gave you this faith never fails.

If we, as a people, are to stand firm in one spirit for generations and thereby live as worthy kingdom citizens, we must be rooted in this conviction that **faith is a gift from God.**

Second, we must be rooted in the conviction that **suffering and persecution are a gift from God.**

Verse 29: "For it has **been granted...**" *Granted.* Given! Awarded! "It has been granted to you for the sake of Christ that 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."

God has given the Philippian believers two gifts: Faith *and* suffering.

It might be relatively easy for you to see faith as a gift. But suffering? Persecution? A gift? Here in Philippians, the focus is clearly on persecution. Their suffering is coming from their opponents. But the gift of suffering in the New Testament is not limited to persecution. It includes sleepless nights as well as beatings (2 Cor 6:5). It includes famine and hunger as well as sword (Rom

8:35). It includes Timothy's frequent stomach ailments as well as his confrontations with false teachers.

The gift of suffering includes the revilings of an angry in-law or adult child who has rejected the faith. It includes the insults of someone at work or on social media when you tell the truth in love. *And*, it includes your chronic pain and fatigue, your bad diagnosis, your insomnia, your grief. How can such things be gifts? Let me explain two reasons that suffering is a gift from God:

1. Suffering is a gift because it is the discipline that God uses to keep you from apostatizing so that you gain eternal life:
 - a. Hebrews 12:7–11 “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. 11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”
 - b. There is a great documentary recently released by the guys from Crosspolitic, called “Spank Your Kids, Save America”. They are making the same point at the pastor to the Hebrews in the passage we just read: Spanking hurts! It stings! No child enjoys being spanked. But Christian parents know that their children need to be spanked (in a godly way). Why? Because the alternative is *death*. I am thankful for my suffering, because I know that this is discipline from the hand of my Father in heaven. He disciplines me so that I do not follow my heart into sin and debauchery. Where would Caleb Ziegler be apart from the discipline of the Lord?! I would be lost. The gift of suffering from God has softened my pride. It has curbed my anger. God has burned my flesh at times so that I do not give into my lusts but pursue purity and holiness and self-control. I have suffered significant injuries; I have suffered extended illness and fatigue; I've suffered the pain of walking with my wife through cancer; I've suffered the effects of rumors and gossip and revilings against my character; I've suffered humiliation and the embarrassment of being without work. I thank God for it. Not because I hate myself or enjoy pain. If not for my suffering, I would have already made the name of Christ a name of scorn; I would have stained my Savior's reputation by my apostasy and foolishness. Oh, thanks be to God that I have not utterly fallen, and that he has corrected me when I have slipped with his discipline! Not only for my sake, but for the

sake of Christ—so that I would not harm his reputation in front of other believers, or in front of my unbelieving family and friends. Suffering is a gift because God uses it to discipline us and keep us in faith.

2. Suffering is a gift because it is the necessary precursor to glory.
 - a. Romans 8:16–17 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, ***provided*** we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
 - b. If we suffer with Christ, ***then*** we will also be glorified with him. When we become Christians, then we enter into his life, and into the pattern of his life: Suffering and death into new life and glory. The apostle Paul says that our “light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen” (2 Cor 4:17–18).

What’s the point? These troubles that we face are not pointless, they’re not meaningless. Paul doesn’t explain exactly how suffering produces glory, but it does. 2 Corinthians 4:17 says it does. Pastor John Piper puts it like this: “every millisecond of your pain — from fallen nature or fallen man — every millisecond of your misery in the path of obedience is producing a peculiar glory you will get because of that suffering... I don’t care if it was cancer or criticism. I don’t care if it was slander or sickness — it wasn’t meaningless because [2 Corinthians 4:17](#) says that my light, momentary, lifelong, total affliction is doing something. It’s doing something. It’s not meaningless. Of course you can’t see what it’s doing. This is the main unseen thing [2 Corinthians 4:18](#) is talking about, I think. What’s the unseen you’re supposed to look at? You’re supposed to look at the promise of God in verse 17 that says *your pain is doing something for you*. You can’t see it. You can’t feel it. Either you see it with the eyes of faith and believe it because the text says it, or you lose heart.”³

Suffering is a gift from God because it is the discipline that keeps us in faith, and because it prepares an eternal weight of glory for believers.

This conviction is the second foundation stone that will shape us into **a fearless people who work hard together for the faith of the gospel**. I’ll draw out two ways that it does this.

First, remember again how Paul exhorts us in verse 28. We are to stand firm, to strive, “*not frightened in anything by [our] opponents*.” Friends, suffering, or even the anticipation of suffering or persecution, can produce in us fear and anxiety. You have felt it. Our country is currently beset with the troubles

³John Piper, “None of Our Misery Is Meaningless,” *Desiring God*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-glory-of-god-in-the-sight-of-eternity/excerpts/none-of-our-misery-is-meaningless>.

that result from giving into that fear and anxiety. It is called the “progressive gaze” — the concern that as you say or write something in public, or speak to your progressive relatives, or listen to your pastor preach, that people to your ideological left will hear of it and despise you for it. Your hackles raise, your heartbeat increases, and your mouth turns to cotton. But you need not be frightened *in anything* by your opponents. It is possible that your relative will cut you off and revile you when you tell the truth in love. It’s possible that people in the public square will despise you and try to shame you or even worse than that. There might be real consequences for your bold witness at work, like losing your job.

But we *cannot* be ruled by anxiety. We must obey God and not be anxious about anything, but present our requests to God with thanksgiving, entrusting ourselves to him. If we do not take this truth from Philippians to heart, receiving suffering and persecution as a gift of discipline and future glory, then we will shrink back from declaring the whole counsel of God, or proclaiming the full, hot gospel, as Pastor Doug likes to say, because we are afraid of pain. Our legs will tremble with anxiety, so we will not stand firm. Our minds will not be unified to strive side by side for the faith of the gospel, because we will be too preoccupied with pleasing men, rather than God. But if we grip this truth with full conviction, then our feasting, our non-anxious laughter, our bold and joyful singing will testify to our opponents of their destruction, but of our salvation, and that from God. May they hear the testimony and repent. Second, the conviction that our suffering is a gift from God will shape us into a fearless, striving people because it frees us to run hard without worrying about the future. If our suffering were something that God reacts to, or if it were something that is just baked into the cake of a fallen world, or something that Satan afflicts us with, and God is doing his best to counteract it—if suffering were not a gift that God gives, but a tragedy that he would change if he could (if only he was released to do something by our apparently-absent faith) — if all this were true, then we would have nothing to stand on and no confidence for the future. We might hope that God will help us out when suffering comes, but the suffering itself might very well be meaningless. But if God has designed our pain and given it to us for faith and for glory, then we need not worry about all the What if’s that lie ahead. What if the cancer comes back? What if I lose my job? What if this business venture falls through, and I can’t provide for my family? What if no one shows up or supports us? What if I never recover?

When we are ruled by anxiety and by these kinds of fears, we become immobilized. But when we are secure in the faith that God is meticulously sovereign over all things, including our pain, then we can lay aside the “What if” questions and work hard, take risks, and strive side by side for the faith of the gospel in our family life: building large, strong, productive households; in our work: telling the truth, having integrity, and building Christian businesses and institutions for the glory of God and the good of our community; in our church: proclaiming a hot gospel of faith and repentance, declaring the whole counsel of God without embarrassment, singing the Psalms loudly and joyfully.

Philippians 1:27–30 provides the fuel for unselfish, humble, *and ambitious* kingdom work based in Christian charity. It gives us two bedrock convictions that faith is a gift from God *and* suffering is a gift from God. And these two convictions produce **a *fearless* people who work hard together for the faith of the gospel.**

Why? Because they are secure in God's sovereignty over their faith and over their pain, which frees them to work hard, to proclaim the truth boldly, and to look to the future with glad confidence all for the sake of the risen King, Jesus. May our risen King make *us* such a people.

Amen!