

## **The Gift of Suffering** **Philippians 1:27 – 2:11**

Good Morning East Lincoln, parents, students' children...anyone else that might be tuning in. I am very happy to continue a study of Philippians with all of you. The temporary separation due to not gathering together.... not as thrilled about that. But here we are – grab a bible, open it up to Philippians 1.

With Philippians 1:27-2:11 ... I see 3 things the text is pointing out:

1. Living a worthy life of the Gospel is achieved when the church is striving with ONE SPIRIT and ONE MIND, together, in UNITY!
2. Fear of opponents of Christ is unnecessary for 2 reasons.
  - a. The suffering that opposition brings to Christians is a sign of their destruction.
  - b. Suffering is the (gift) soil that creates the deepest Godly growth.
3. Our church should be responding to opposition and suffering with encouragements, comforts, as well as participation in affections and sympathies - WITH the mindset of Christ.

I am directing us to address these 3 points because I think that is what the text is saying...Let's look at it together.

Follow along with me – Philippians 1:27 *“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you, **or I 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.”*

Well, we made it one verse and we see the first point for today! Living a worthy life of the Gospel is achieved when the church is unified (one spirit, one mind) *“striving side by side for the faith of the gospel”*. This is really telling us to engage in the **mission** of the gospel. That mission is given to us directly from Jesus - to *“go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you to the end of the age.”* Matt28:19-20

I do not think we need lots of time here, do we? A team divided or “not on the same page” is not going to be successful in their effort. A church team not striving side by side with one mind and in one spirit will not honor God. What about when the world opposes Christians? What do we do then? Do we fight against opposition in **common ways**? Let’s hold those questions up against the next verses.

Read with me – onto verse 28-30.

*(We just read to be of one spirit, one mind, striving side by side)...<sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> 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, <sup>30</sup> engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*

2. Fear of opponents of Christ is unnecessary for 2 reasons.
  - a. The suffering that opposition brings to Christians is a sign of their destruction.

Let’s think about that. It’s a sobering thought. Paul is saying, those organizations, those businesses, those in government, people, in general – will suffer the wrath of God one day. The wrath of God **that** is to be inflicted upon them **should** stir up sympathy from us as Christians. We should be sad and concerned for our opponents – not fighting against them in fear.

Paul shows us this, .....**he suffered**. When he says the “conflict he had” vs, 30, Paul was reminding those in Philippi about the abuse he suffered while he was there...which was....

He cast a demon out of a fortune telling slave girl and her owners beat Paul, along with his missionary partner Silas, then Roman officials arrested them and put them in prison, in stocks.

Paul and Silas’s response to this opposition? Did they fight back in common ways?

No they prayed and sang, Gods response, to create an earthquake that broke their bonds and the door. Paul and Silas’s response? Did they gather support against a corrupt ungodly government? But they stay put. They choose more suffering. For

me, this rings with the teaching of Jesus when he taught about submitting to oppression by a unbelieving government – In the sermon on the mount Jesus tells us – when the wicked unbelieving government has soldiers force you to carry their packs a mile – don't concern yourself with the corruption of the government – concern your self with **who reigns in their hearts** – show them that **I reign in your heart**, and show them **my love** by not just submitting to carrying the pack without complaint – show them my **grace by carrying it twice as far**. (Matt5:41). Submitting to the opposition of Christ does not always go well for Christians in this world, but in this case, the willingness to suffer by Paul and Silas turns out well.

The Jailer wakes up and is about to kill himself for losing the prisoners (that's how that worked back then) – they say – hey – don't do it – don't kill yourself, we are right here. (again, it doesn't always go well for Christians to submit to the suffering a government inflicts...this time it works out well for Paul and Silas.)

The Roman soldier is so moved he responds to the gospel and is saved.

The public beating, the imprisonment and locking in stocks – the church in Philippi **saw** Paul deal with that before – and Paul is saying, He is dealing with that again, there in Rome.

Paul is reminding them, and us, that, as opposition comes (it will always come), as suffering comes (suffering will always come), it is our reaction to that opposition, our reaction to the suffering that is the important thing.

But the more common reaction to opponents of Christ by Christians, here in America, is to fight. **Now, I'm not disagreeing with standing firm for the truth of Jesus. I'm all for that! I'm all for standing firm for what scripture says. I'm disagreeing with standing firm for non-gospel issues and fighting in common ways of fighting.** Our response should be love and forgive, to turn the other cheek, **not fight** out of fear of those who oppose Christ.

**If our** response to **unbelievers** is to fight with them in **normal ways** – we are not being like Paul or like Jesus. We are to fight back, yes, but we are to fight back with love as our weapon.

Verse 29 communicates it clearly. We believe in Jesus and that belief grants us suffering. “Grant” means to gift. God is GIFTING us with suffering. I believe the reason God “GIFTS” us with suffering is because:

- a. Suffering is the soil that creates the deepest Godly growth.

When I spend time thinking about why God would use suffering to display His grace more than healing or blessing. Well, it makes some very practical sense. In fact, Jesus taught us directly on how we are to respond to our opposition. Here are the words of Jesus himself out of Luke 6 - <sup>27</sup> *“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic<sup>b]</sup> either. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ....<sup>35</sup> ..and your reward will be great (treasures in heaven Matt6:19-20), and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

Being merciful to opposition is not a natural reaction. That’s why it’s a Christian reaction. Christ reacted to our opposition to Him, of unbelief, with love – Jesus fought the - **fight of all fights** - with love. And we are to imitate that love (Eph5:1-2).

And when we see people use suffering to fuel an effort for good! Oh, how those efforts inspire us. Those are the best kind of stories.

Hears a couple of ways to help think about this, what’s NOT inspiring is for a mountain climber to get in a comfortable helicopter and take a peaceful ride up to the top of the mountain! Right?<sup>i</sup>

Or running a cross country racer by getting in a nice golf cart, cold drink in hand, and riding quietly and comfortably to the finish line. NOT suffering – NOT persevering – NOT impressive.

But, lets stick with Cross Country racing for a minute, Paul used running a race as an example for a life of faith in 1Cor:9. Let’s say you are a cross country runner who has limited resources or limited strength or limited ability and within all the limitations set before you – you run as hard as you can anyway. That’s inspiring.

But it's even more inspiring if you're a cross country runner with limitations, running as hard as you can, and begin to face problem upon problem, and keep going.

Problems like, having team members let you down, or having the team betray you, or having your shoes fall apart or you get lost or maybe trees continually fall in front of you across the path....and....despite all the challenges adding to the weakness you began with, you... keep going, you never give up...and those stories are the most inspiring, even if the runner doesn't win the race.

These perseverance stories highlight the truth that suffering is the soil that leads to the deepest and most impressive growth. And with running in mind, God brought Steve Prefontaine to my mind as an example. (side note: I think many of us could benefit greatly by looking at NON-God stories from life and see Gods word within them. By looking into life this way you can develop ways to share about Jesus that come from everyday life – which **might** be more valuable than sharing stories about ministry workers or famous church people. It **CAN** be more valuable, **not saying IT IS** more valuable...think about that as I continue with this example.)

If you don't know who Steve Prefontaine is, he was a great American long-distance runner from Coos Bay, Oregon. In high school he set the national record for the *2-mile with a time of 8:41*. In college he won *four consecutive NCAA track titles at three miles, a feat never before accomplished*. He set American records at every distance from 2,000 to 10,000 meters. He went five years without a loss to any American at any distance greater than a mile. And when running at Oregon University's Hayward field, he never lost a race longer than a mile to anyone, American or foreign. Never.<sup>ii</sup>

But its not just the wins that makes Steve Prefontaine such a great and inspirational story. He did lose, he went to the 1972 Olympics and ran with his normal bold and courageous style, and lost. He wasn't supposed to win.

But he ran so hard that he *almost* won. He taxed his body so completely that he lost the lead in the last 50 meters and the bronze medal in the last 10 meters.

But, inspiration comes from the way He ran all his races, his mindset and his personality. Those things add so much to his story.<sup>iii</sup>

**In many ways an average person:** He was an unsophisticated, small-town kid. To his teammates, Pre was easygoing, “just one of the guys.” He lived in a trailer and survived on food stamps. He took his dog to class with him. He grew his own vegetables.

**Loyal to his team:** In 1971 Prefontaine won the conference cross country title and the university said they would only send Steve out to the national championship in Knoxville Tennessee. Prefontaine told Oregon University that he would refuse to go unless they sent the whole team. They were sent and his teammates responded by adding to Prefontaine’s individual national title with the team title as well.<sup>iv</sup>

**Sacrificed himself for others:** He went to schools and talked with the kids. He went to the state prison and got involved with their programs.<sup>v</sup> He spoke out against the shabby treatment of student athletes at the 1972 Olympics, he knew he would suffer for it, but he spoke out anyway. Pre sacrificed himself for the people who came to see him. In 1973, at a four-way track meet, drew a huge crowd. Not wanting to disappoint them, Pre ran a 3:56 mile and a 13:06 three-mile, only hours apart, the greatest performance of the 1 and 3 mile races, when run on the same day, in history. This historic effort taxed his body badly, interrupting his ability to train normally for days. Even so, 13 days after that historic double distance record, he ran the third fastest mile by any American at the time – with a time of 3:55.<sup>vi</sup>

But was it really about sacrificing himself for the people who came to see him run or was it just a pure desire to win? To answer that, In 1974 Prefontaine had a public **workout** scheduled, and thousands of people showed up to watch him. But, as fate would have it, this workout was the same day as the valley’s annual “burning day”. Thousands of acres were being burned off and produced smoke so thick it was hard to see across the track. Most of the people there had trouble breathing, but Pre still ran his mile workout, finishing in 3:58 and coughing blood at the end of it. He did not want to let those people down.<sup>vii</sup> A story is told by a father who saw Prefontaine ignore his son’s request for an autograph before a race, only to watch Prefontaine sign the autograph for his son after the race, then invite the young man to join him for his cool down jog so they could talk.<sup>viii</sup>

Enough of Prefontaine!?! Probably. And why focus so much on this young American runner? Well, I love how Pre shows us Colossians 3:23 *“Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being, for the Lord and not for men,”*. I love how the loyalty to his teammates, shows us – Phil1:27 to *“strive side by side for the faith of the gospel.”* And I love how Steve display putting others first while you live now, Phil 2:3. I want us to be inspired by him to *“consider how to spur each other on to love and good deeds”* Heb10:24.

**Last Point, He had limitations, yet pushed on:** If he did not suffer, then the results would have been, different, and certainly less. You see Steve Prefontaine was shorter than most premier long-distance runners at 5’9” and his legs had a 1-inch difference in length.<sup>ix</sup> Many athletes with **similar leg length** difference, have testified about how challenging that difference can be. It effects all kinds of body movement and makes training and performing more difficult. Also, his running style was wrong, he ran with a habit of holding his head off to the side – reducing efficiency, and he had an uncommon stride, it wasn’t smooth – many people tell about how painful it looked when they watched Prefontaine run. And, he always ran in front. He never let anyone else run in front of him and block the wind, drafting is what that is called and it’s a common practice for runners. Pre didn’t draft, ever, he took the lead. Often his lead was WAY out in front as he relentlessly pushed HIMSELF to the limit. Sadly, he passed away in a car accident in 1975.

Deep down in his heart, Steve did not really focus on these limitations. He focused on enduring the pain that running that hard created, and that produced something special.

A direct quote from Steve **“I can endure more pain than anyone.... That's why I win, because I can endure more pain.”<sup>x</sup>**

**Therefore, embrace** the suffering that opposition brings by reacting in love instead of the **common ways** of fighting. Examples like this present themselves often. And....Suffering WILL always be presented to believers, which gives us the best kind of soil to produce Christ like lives, as God says in 2Cor12:10 *“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* **Remember**

**that strength people, because God is telling us to use that strength to respond in certain ways.**

Let's look at Phil2:1-2 *"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind"* UNITY UNITY UNITY

This is beautiful. So true! When we deal with the suffering the opponents of Christ WILL ALWAYS present to us, we should be, as a church, finding encouragement with each other within the suffering. We should be finding comfort in how we love each other within the suffering. We should be experiencing the Spirit of God as it leads us to acts of affection and sympathy for each other. Paul was hoping the church in Philippi would "complete" his joy by expanding their efforts as Christians. He has already praised them for their participation in the work of the Gospel (Phil1:5) but now he is saying **do this also** to complete his joy. My 3<sup>rd</sup> point for today.

BUT

We need to have the right mindset to pull this off. To be effective in encouragement, in giving comfort, in giving affection and sympathy we MUST set our minds on the **raw, sacrificial service**, displayed in the love of Jesus Christ.

This is a huge ask of God – this is very difficult! How do we love everyone in the church when there are so many different personalities and distractions?

How do we love our enemies? How do we turn the other cheek when we get punched for proclaiming Jesus is the Son of God? God gives us the answer. Look at Phil2:3-5

*<sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,*

So work at NOT being prideful, not having to "be right". Be humble, and think of others more than yourself. This mindset is ours to have, in Christ Jesus, verse 5.



The mind of Christ. The mind of God. We cannot fully have the mind of God, but God gives us a mindset we can understand and pursue. The next section of scripture is some of the most powerful in all of scripture. Look with me: Phil2:6-8

*<sup>6</sup> who (Jesus), though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. He did not fight them, he died in love for them – for us.*

This is the mind of Christ given to us...the Son of God did not consider Himself to be more important than us. He loved us so perfectly that he took the form of a man (Our 1<sup>st</sup> advent reading, reminding us of this gift) as a man he lowered Himself down to be a servant to us. The High King, creator of all things, .....washing feet.....wow. And more real for us than getting our feet washed, Jesus washes away all the filth of our sin by dying on a cross, as our substitute.

Something wonderful was earned by Christ for that obedience, our salvation and glory forever. The Father has exalted Him and is moving so that in the end, every knee will bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord – to the Glory of God the Father. The last verses of our scriptures today, Phil 2:9-11.

That day is coming, .... and that day is going to be awesome for those of us who believe. But that day is **coming**, and it is going to be horror for those who oppose Him, and in turn are opposing us.

We are not at that day yet. Our day is here and now. The three points I have addressed really turn into three questions for Christians (I think). Those questions being:

1. Living a worthy life of the Gospel is achieved when the church is striving with ONE SPIRIT and ONE MIND, together, in UNITY!
  - a. Will you strive to **enhance** unity in our church, by focusing on the GOSPEL, so others see Gods love and NOT disagreement?
2. Fear of opponents of Christ is unnecessary for 2 reasons. A. their opposition is a sign of their destruction and B. the suffering they bring is our richest soil to grow like Christ. Therefore,

- a. Will you USE the suffering opponents bring as opportunities to **fight them with love** instead of disagreeing and arguing, and insulting them like the common man does?
3. Our church should be responding to opposition and suffering with encouragements, comforts, as well as participation in affections and sympathies.
  - a. So, will submit more to Jesus by living with His mindset of treating the world with humbleness, a servants heart to the point of death, even death on a cross?

Let's put down the swords of any **non-gospel disagreements** with our world and each other and pick up the sword of Love. Let others look upon East Lincoln as one of those churches that, in love, expects Christians to be enjoying repentance (1Cor5), a church so focused on the Gospel it can't help working at loving others into the faith, a church focused on helping each other grow, and a church that loves each other well within that all those efforts. I encourage us to examine ourselves and enjoy the growth we can experience if we work at making our lives more focused on the Great Commission and I implore all of us to embrace the mindset of Christ, to love others sacrificially. So within that effort, we do a better job of imitating Jesus.

I'm going to finish our time together with a prayer, please join me and know that this is the end of our virtual time together this morning. Thank you for joining me, lets pray.

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<sup>i</sup> Rightnow Media Study of Ephesians, Michael DeFazio

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.podiumrunner.com/culture/jeff-johnson-what-makes-pre-so-special/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.podiumrunner.com/culture/jeff-johnson-what-makes-pre-so-special/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.podiumrunner.com/culture/jeff-johnson-what-makes-pre-so-special/>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.podiumrunner.com/culture/jeff-johnson-what-makes-pre-so-special/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.podiumrunner.com/culture/jeff-johnson-what-makes-pre-so-special/>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.podiumrunner.com/culture/jeff-johnson-what-makes-pre-so-special/>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.podiumrunner.com/culture/jeff-johnson-what-makes-pre-so-special/>

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.quora.com/How-does-having-a-shorter-leg-affect-running-stride>

<sup>x</sup> <https://www.quotetab.com/quote/by-steve-prefontaine/i-can-endure-more-pain-then-anyone-youve-met-thats-why-i-win-because-i-can-en>