

Steadfast Joy

Belcroft Bible Church

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Well, good morning Belcroft. It is as always an undeserved privilege to stand before you and preach God's word. I've had the blessing of walking alongside you through the book of Philippians. And as we continue our slow stroll through the "Epistle of Joy," today, we are going to close out chapter 1. We've made it the end of chapter 1, I think it's been four years now. So at this rate, by the time my daughters are going away to college, we should be in chapter 3. But, knowing that, please turn in your copy of God's Word to Philippians 1. We'll be reading verses 21 to 30. We'll be focusing our time today though in verses 27 to 30. To remind you of the context, though, we're stepping back to verse 21. So please follow along with me as I read aloud.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

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

Please join with me in a moment of prayer.

Gracious and merciful Father, we praise you for this morning and the opportunity to come before you in worship. We praise you for the time of corporate worship, the chance to sing together as your church. Help us Lord, as we hear your Word. Help me to diminish, help me to be out of the way and let your Word shine through. We praise you for truth,

and how you've guarded your Word throughout history, that we might know it. We ask you to help us to be good stewards of your Word, that we would be a people who know your Word and use your Word and stand on unwavering truth. Help us to be a people who flee from idle chatter and fiercely pursue godliness. As we look at the encouragement and exhortations Paul sent to the church at Philippi so many years ago, guide us in following that same example Paul set forth. Help us now to be hearers of the Word and good doers as well. We love you, Lord. We praise you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

So it's been a while since I've preached; it's important that we understand the context of this epistle. So let's go back and get some context set. First, let me remind you of this church in Philippi. The church in Philippi is the first European church; the city of Philippi was in Macedonia. Paul went here on his second missionary journey, and the city of Philippi had a strong connection to Rome. This is a Roman colony. So, unlike many other cities throughout the empire, Philippi was treated like and acted as if they were in the Italian capital. They had all the rights and privileges of a Roman city and they identified as Roman; they spoke Latin. If they sold shirts and college sweatshirts, they'd be "Go Rome!" All about it. It's important to remember this because they find their identity as citizens of Rome to be a point of great pride. They saw themselves as Roman. They understood the roles and responsibilities of a citizen from a different lens than the people of the church in Jerusalem, or just about any of the other cities in the Middle East. Paul knows this fact well and he's going to address it, and even appeal to it in a few different ways.

We also know this, that he didn't have very many Jewish people, had a very minimal Jewish influence. There wasn't even enough to have a synagogue in this city. The people actually met down by the river. Paul, initially when he went there, wasn't treated well in this city. But some faithful believers came out of the city, and the church was established and was growing. I encourage you, as I have done before, reading out of Philippians, take time this week, go back to Acts 16. Read through Acts 16. That's when Paul first visits and establishes this church. We learned that this mostly Gentile church was growing. And though we learned that they themselves were not a wealthy group of people, they were generous and they willingly gave support to Paul in his ministry. The generosity of the Philippian unbelievers even caught Paul off guard, as they also financially gave to support the church in Jerusalem.

Much like Paul, the church at Philippi was being persecuted for the cause of Christ. They were being attacked by false teachers, and they were being attacked in the unity of their church. It was being threatened by a feud between two prominent women within their body. I often think, how terrifying would it be to receive that letter from Paul and have your name pop up in there? Imagine one of these ladies, Euodia and Syntyche—she's sitting in the back of the church and all of a sudden, he calls them out by name, an awkward spot and awkward time to be in the congregation.

Continuing in context, we look at where Paul is. Remember that Paul wrote this letter from Rome. Now he talked about wanting to go to Rome to preach there, but he got to Rome in a very different way than he was anticipating. Paul was expecting to travel there probably by ship, not by shipwreck and not in chains. But now Paul's in his fourth year as a Roman prisoner awaiting Emperor Nero's final decision in the charges against him. I shared last time that Paul was not in a formal prison, but he's actually in a home that was constantly under guard by the Praetorian Guard. These were the emperor's own soldiers, who were maintained within the city of Rome. Originally, you couldn't have an army in Rome; Caesar changed that. Caesar Augustus set them up to maintain control of the city, and their number was increased from a little over 5,000 up to 10,000 men. Ultimately, these soldiers carried serious power. If you imagine you're the occupying power in a city, they have some influence. They even had influence to the point of impacting who the next emperor could be. Paul was chained to some of these men and had a powerful effect on the group as a whole. Kenneth West describes the impact by saying this; he said, “Paul lived for two years with a Roman soldier chained to his wrist. As the different soldiers would take their turn guarding Paul, they would hear the conversations he had with visitors, conversations for the gospel, and the Savior of sinners. They would hear the apostle pray and would listen as he dictated the epistles he wrote. The noble prisoner would talk to them about their souls, talking in international Greek so common in those days. Thus the gospel went through the barracks of the Roman soldiers, a place that it would not have gone if Paul had not been a prisoner there.” Praise God for His providence. Whether these soldiers like it or not, Paul was going to keep preaching. They had a front row seat to constant ministry. They got to listen to every conversation. And I imagine, as the visitors left, if the soldiers didn't understand something, they had the means to ask Paul direct questions.

So when we look at the circumstances surrounding the city of Philippi and Paul, who's writing to encourage these believers, we get a clearer view of their situation. One of the beautiful things about this letter that Paul writes is that, throughout it, he's calling the people to be joyful, to rejoice. That's why it's called the "Epistle of Joy." He says this about 16 times throughout this brief book; he reinforces the fact that true, biblical joy is not derived from circumstances. It's not a byproduct of our temporary earthly predicaments, but rather a fruit of our eternal position. True, biblical joy is not happiness, but the hope, comfort, and conviction that comes from the grace of God and the confidence of our salvation. Joy is not driven by one's circumstances, but rather by one's position, which is granted by an unchanging, unwavering, and sovereign heavenly Father. While happiness is fleeting and leaves us pursuing it, joy is a security that we've been pursued by Christ. Because of the security, we're commanded to rejoice. In 1 Thessalonians, 5:16 and 18, it says, *"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* Never lose sight of that. Never mistake happiness for joy. Happiness is fleeting. Your circumstances will dictate your happiness, but the joy we have is in Christ alone.

Last time I preached, we ended with Paul laying out a strong tension. He feels he's being pulled in two directions. He longs to be with his Savior. He has a strong desire to leave this life and finally be in the full presence of Christ. Do you ever run a long race and you get toward the end, you're longing to be done? You're longing to be finished, you've done the work. I remember running in a marathon in Disneyworld. It was a lot of fun for the first 17 miles. Marathons are 26 miles. And I remember getting toward the end, and I'm so tired and ready to be done. And someone said, "Oh, the finish line is just past the big, big ball, the big globe." And I thought, that's really far away. I want to be finished. That's this yearning that Paul is talking about. He wants to be done. He's longing for the end. But he makes it clear that, even though that's his preference, it's not what he's going to do. For, left solely to Paul, he would run toward that option; he'd want to be done. Yet he feels pressed at the same time to remain. His reason for remaining rests in the fact that he feels called to service and care for fellow believers. His work is not finished; his race isn't over. For the sake of believers, like the Philippians, Paul will deny himself the greater option. He knows that if God chooses, he will stay so that he might preach the Word and build up believers.

His remaining behind is taking an attitude of a servant of Christ, for the growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. This growth requires the consistent teaching of God's Word, and for the Word of God to be, as Steve Lawson puts it, "internalized in the lives of believers, that growth in the Scriptures and in sanctification are inseparably bound." I'll say that again: "Growth in the Scripture and sanctification are inseparably bound" together. Jesus prayed, "*Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth,*" in John 17:17. The truth of the Word is the instrument used by God to bring out Christ's likeness. A steady diet of the Word is essential to every believer's spiritual health. We see Paul write the same thing elsewhere, in Colossians 3. And Peter writes the same idea in 1 Peter 2. As believers, our spiritual health is dictated in proportion to our hunger for the Word. How hungry are you? How much time are you spending in God's Word? It's a good indicator of your health.

So now, we come to where we began, in today's passage. Paul has laid the clear foundation for this letter. He's established that it's a personal letter to a church he loves, he longs to be with. He's established that he longs to come to this church and feels called to further train and instruct these people in godliness. But now, he gets to the point, that he's calling on the people to step out in action. He's calling them to be joyful but also to be steadfast in their joy. Therefore, we'll see today how Paul highlights that biblical joy comes from a gospel-centered life lived steadfastly in understanding and following Paul's example. We will see the necessity of being steadfast in community, steadfast in courage, and steadfast in calling. These are the three points for our time today in this passage: steadfast in community; steadfast in courage; and steadfast in calling. The three C's, community, courage, calling.

The first word we'll look at this morning is *community*, being steadfast in community. The idea of being steadfast relates directly to the conduct that is expected of believers. The church at Philippi was actually one of the more mature churches to whom Paul was writing. But, even in spite of that, they had their own problems within the church. They had disputes. They had sins to deal with, fear, doubt, division. On top of that, they needed to be constantly guarding themselves against false teachers. As we have seen through our Wednesday night class, this past fall, there are so many false teachers. And there was so much false doctrine that existed in the early days of the church. We see many of those

false ideas are still around today. They just get recycled. They come back. There are groups that claim to be followers of Christ, and they take the truth and they twist it. They remove or add, making the Word no longer the Word. Paul has moved from the point where he is speaking about himself and the example he has set. His tone and goal right now has shifted to the well-being of the church. He starts by saying this: he says, *“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you're standing firm in one spirit, in one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”*

It's important to note that Paul starts this verse with the word, *only*. He boiled everything down to this one point. This is the crux of his opening statements. This is the part the church cannot miss. He says to *“conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel...”* He's reminding this church of the importance of the example they have and the lives they must lead as believers. They are a church surrounded by pagan influences, yet their responsibility is to act in a way that sets them apart from the rest of society. This is why I had Brian read Romans 12, this morning, as a reminder of how we as the church are called to be transformed and no longer reflect the world that's around us. The community of our church should be one that's marked by the joy of the gospel, and clearly being identifiable. We should stand out for the things we do and say and the way in which we live. Paul reiterates this point later in chapter 2, starting in verse 15, when he says, *“that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”* You are to be above reproach, to hold fast in the Word of life. You are to conduct yourselves in a worthy way.

Again, he uses that word, *conduct*. I want to make it take a moment to address this word choice here, because it would make perfect sense to the people in the church at Philippi. John MacArthur explains this well in saying the verb, *conduct*, the phrase “conduct yourselves” is a very interesting verb. It literally, at its root and its original meaning, meant to behave as citizens of a polis. That's where we get the word political, a city state, a free state. You're to conduct yourselves in a manner that would be proper behavior of a citizen. Remember, citizenship meant a lot to the people of Philippi. They're a Roman

colony. Citizenship is what they speak, what they breathe. They're hundreds of miles from Italy. They're about 800 miles from Rome. But they act and function as if they're in the heart of the Italian peninsula. The pressure from society around them was to celebrate their Roman citizenship. But Paul is calling on them to be a citizen of a higher calling.

This is not a call of each individual to go their own way. As R.C. Sproul would say that the Philippian Christians, they could not effectively contend for the gospel as lone rangers. They needed to work together, being of one mind and one purpose, refusing to grieve the one spirit who knits us together in love, unity, and truth. Our citizenship is in heaven. That's what he has in mind. Here, he's saying, live according to the values, customs, and cultures of the heavenly Kingdom; live for the good of others, not for yourself; and may all your talents, abilities, endeavors, successes be directed at the community rather than yourself. Believers are called to live in partnership with others, to live as members of a spiritual kingdom, namely the church, to live as citizens governed by the Law of God, by righteousness, faith, love, service, worship. The Bible is very clear that, through the gospel, we have been translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of God. We have been made citizens of a new community in spiritual fellowship, the heavenly Church. That's Paul's point. We are to live as citizens.

Our joy should be evident. The hope we have and the Savior we're living for should not be a mystery to anyone. If you claim to have a private faith, you've entirely missed the mark. The joy we have, the hope we live in, should be evident. We need to be living as a people who are striving together. Our growth together is imperative. Individual growth is good, but unity and standing together is what we're called to do. We can't lose sight of the importance Paul puts on standing firm together. This idea of standing firm, it's a military term. It's unmoving, like a wall of soldiers standing side by side. It's not easily knocked over or scattered, but determined and prepared. Think of a line of offensive lineman or defensive lineman standing together; they're not easily knocked over. If they're good at football, that is, they're not easily knocked over. They're standing firm, standing firm against the dangers of false teaching.

One man is standing by himself, it's not easy. Standing together, you have support in many ways. Stand firm against false teaching, the snares of the world, the temptations to turn

from truth. Do you ever run a long race by yourself? It's not fun. It's not enjoyable. But if you're running with someone, it changes it. When you're running with a larger group, it changes it completely. When you think about a 100-mile bike ride, we do a 100-mile bike ride every June. One hundred miles is far; it takes a while. But it doesn't feel that way. When there's many of you riding together, you're all moving together in the right direction. When you get tired and worn out and want to stop and want to give up, you're encouraged by the guy next to you. You're pushed along or even pulled along by the person right in front of you. What a joy it is, to be able to stand together. Paul says this, again, he reiterated this, saying that if he's able to be there, or if he's far away, he wants to know that the church is standing together. I think the same thing of Pastor Matt and Tom—is there a way they want to hear that we are standing together? (Thankfully, Pastor Matt is not in a Roman prison. I hope he comes back soon). But likewise, we need to stand steadfast in our community.

Our second point is standing steadfast in courage. Verse 28 says, *“and not frightened at anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction but of your salvation, and that from God, as followers of Jesus Christ.”* We can expect and should expect opposition. Jesus said so in John 16:33: *“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace in this world. You will have trouble but take heart, I have overcome the world.”* Paul said the same thing in Acts 14:22: *“Through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.”* Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 4:12: *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, as though something strange were happening to you.”* The Philippians are well aware that they are facing opposition. Lawson says the opposition of the opponents of the Philippian Christians are the false teachers who have infiltrated the church in Philippi with their corrupt teaching. These are the Judaizers who attempt to put the Philippians back under the Mosaic Law of the Old Covenant. They are the dogs, unclean and vicious, evil workers who teach a false circumcision. They are enemies of the cross whose end is destruction. These false teachers must be exposed and resisted lest they pollute the body of the believers in Philippi and misdirect their lives. By opposing the truth, these false teachers are making it evermore clear that they are headed for destruction. Paul reminded the Philippians to cling to truth and stand against these false teachers. He puts forth a clear warning against this type of distortion when he writes in Galatians 1:8: *“But if we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to*

you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." These false teachers deserve destruction because they're leading others down a path to destruction.

The contrary to this is the people of the church standing strong and courageous in their conviction and dedication to the truth. The term that Paul's using here when he says "not be frightened" is a Greek term that's only used here in the New Testament. In Greek, this term is a vivid term, unique in the Greek Bible and denoting the uncontrollable stampede of startled horses. If you've ever seen startled horses running together, it's a scary thing. You can feel the ground thundering around you. I haven't worked around very many horses but a lot of cattle. When cattle start moving as a group, it's a scary thing. They're not going to move out of your way; you're in *their* way. Just think Mufasa. The scary thing is this term, it means to be alarmed, let oneself be intimidated. Paul is telling the church not to allow yourselves to be afraid of these opponents. He says that by standing firm against these people who are attacking the truth, the church is giving a clear indication that these opponents are destined for destruction. What joy that standing together proves that point. David Guzik remarked about this passage, "When Christians stand strong against intimidation, against the world, against flesh and against the devil, it shows those spiritual enemies that their ultimate destruction is certain." When our spiritual enemies failed to make us afraid, they have failed completely, because they really have no other weapon than fear and intimidation. When we fail to be not in any way terrified by our adversaries, we give hope and confidence to our spiritual enemies, even though it is a false hope and confidence, because their destruction is still assured.

The salvation that Paul is reminding the believer of is the center of the gospel. It applies to us. It's the hope we have and the reason for joy. We as a church today have reason for joy because of this salvation. Maybe you're here today and you don't know joy. Maybe you haven't received that hope. The gospel, the good news, is how we are saved. It's the fact that a good and perfect God made a good and perfect world. He created man and woman, and they chose to disobey and sin against a holy, perfect God. Because of that sin, there was a great divide and the need for redemption. God in His perfect providence gave a way for us to be redeemed to Him. But it took a perfect sacrifice; it took sending

the one, the only one who could save us, His Son, Jesus Christ, who came as a man, lived a sinless life, and died on the cross, bearing our sin and shame. He then rose from the grave. Because of the free gift of salvation, we're able to have faith. We are able to repent of our sins and we're able to believe. We've been redeemed as sons and daughters of the one true King, not by our doing, but entirely by our Savior. The best thing that we could bring to the Lord on our own would be filthy rags. Salvation comes from the Lord alone. There is no other means for salvation. Acts 4:12 says, *"and there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Distorting this truth is what the false teachers are doing in Philippi. They're taking the truth I just shared and adding to it, telling these faithful believers that, in order to really be saved, there's other things that they must do. False teachers always take the truth and twist it. The first example we see of this was Satan in the Garden of Eden, when he takes what God has said and then questions it and twists it. A twisted truth is no truth at all. But unfortunately, sometimes people don't tell the truth. They can be really good at giving you most of a truth, most of the story of a situation that happened. I could ask four people about a specific incident and receive four completely different answers. Usually, each of the answers are stories aimed to better their own position. The things they add, the things they leave out, put them in a better spot. This is exactly what these false teachers are doing, looking to distort what is true and gain for themselves. By standing strong, by being bold and standing together, there's encouragement to believers, seeing the faithfulness of the Lord working through the lives of believers.

I want you to notice that Paul doesn't mention anything about being able to rest. He doesn't say anything about letting down your guard and being happy. There's no mention of living your best life. There's nothing here said of comfort or of wealth or pleasantries. On the contrary, he says, people will be challenging you. False teachers will come after you. But you must stand firm and be brave in the face of adversity. It's important to note that the courage of which Paul's talking doesn't come with the absence of something that causes fear. This courage is necessary because there is persecution. There are hard things to endure. Fear and anxiety is something we so greatly do not wish to endure that we expect to not have it at all. Well, you don't need courage if there's no opposition. Sitting

on a hammock on a beach somewhere is not a stressful situation. There isn't a great deal of enduring going on when you're lounging. No, Paul is making it clear that there will be trouble. We can see fear or anxiety isn't something that's entirely bad and shouldn't be a part of our lives at all. But, on the contrary, throughout Scripture we learn about healthy fear. Being nervous in situations is a good thing. Being nervous around a poisonous snake is a good thing. Being cautious around fire is a necessary thing. Being rightly fearful of our awesome God is essential. The dangerous thing when all fear, all healthy fear, is removed. If we have no healthy fear, then we become reckless and careless. But the courage we need and the courage we have is important in the face of adversity.

Courage is defined as the ability to do something that frightens one, or strength in the face of pain or grief. We need to have a healthy fear, but we need to guard against the desire to cower and run from the things we need to stand firm in. Scripture reminds us not to be crippled by fear and not to let anxiety take control. Jesus reminds us of this in Matthew 5 when he says, *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"* Paul will give a similar reminder the church at Philippi later on in this chapter on this book, in chapter 4, when he says, *"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 transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* We're being called to stand firm in truth. This firm standing is an encouragement to the believers everywhere.

I think of the great encouragement we can see as we go through the "Forerunners of the Faith" class on Wednesday nights. We're able to see how many men and women throughout history, and the history of the church, have stood boldly for truth. They faced adversity and still stood strong. They defended truth and held to the faith. Many of them were hurt, tortured, beaten, and even martyred for standing firm. They lost their earthly lives by heeding the same message Paul is sharing with the church at Philippi. As followers

of Jesus Christ, we can expect and should expect opposition. But our call is to have steadfast courage.

This brings us to our third and final point. Steadfast in calling, steadfast in the community, steadfast in courage. Steadfast in calling, verse 29 and 30 say this, *“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, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now here that I still have.”* Now, I have two subpoints to this final point. These two points are this: the gift of believing and the gift of suffering. It's a hard one, the gift of suffering. The gift of believing and the gift of suffering. Paul continues in that saving faith has been granted to all believers. Our belief is given us given to us by God. Remember that; never lose sight of that. We do not have the capacity to believe in the gospel on our own. Ephesians 2:1 reminds us that we were dead in our sins, that we were slaves to our sins and, if left to our own ways, we would continue in sin. It's because of the amazing work of grace that we are saved, not based on anything we have done. Ephesians 2 continues in verse 8 and 9 to say, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* Paul reminds this church that they need to submit together because their faith is not their own doing, but it has been granted to them by God. This is the gift of blessing. This is the good news. This is the gospel. We have been saved and we rejoice because of what God has done. We celebrate this and, in many cases, this is where we want to stop. We want to stop at the gift of blessing. The world would tell you to stop at the gift of blessing.

But we don't stop there. The next phrase is hard. The next phrase is calling on us to suffer, to suffer for His sake. We as a culture are not good at suffering. We don't even handle boredom well. But suffering is something we aim to avoid at just about all costs. We're trained and taught to avoid such things that cause us pain. It makes sense. This is good advice in scenarios such as touching a hot stove. Don't touch a hot stove. It'll hurt you. If the hot stove will cause pain, don't do it. But more importantly, we're constantly seeking ways to avoid that which is challenging or painful. If there's a faster, easier way to get somewhere or to get something done, we want it and we want it right now. If we're uncomfortable, we don't handle it. We're all too quick to complain. We don't have a very high tolerance for inconvenience, let alone suffering. We complain about the amount of

legroom on a flight and how challenging it can be to be stuck in a middle seat. We completely forget about the fact that we're flying through the sky, moving hundreds of miles per hour, cutting travel times down to almost nothing. If we're uncomfortable for too long, we often see that as something to avoid.

The idea of retirement is frequently praised and aimed for as the time in which we can finally be comfortable. That is what makes the next portion of this challenging. Paul is saying that everyone who's given saving faith by God is also appointed to suffer for His sake, that suffering and salvation go hand in hand. It says in 2 Timothy 3:12, *"Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* As followers of Christ Jesus, we should be expecting to suffer. And we should accept the fact that we will suffer. When we were at the Courageous Churchmen conference last year, Lance Quinn, talking about talking about 2 Timothy was saying, "Why, when we've been enlisted in the army of the Lord, do we think we're the color guard? Do we think that we only get to go on parade?" That's not what we've been called to do. We've been called to fight; we've been called to endure. This is the antithesis of what you would hear in a church focused on the prosperity gospel. In trials and suffering, rather than calling out, "Why me?", we should be focusing on the eternal goodness and faithfulness of God. Peter writes in 1 Peter 4:13 to 14, *"But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."* This is a foreign concept to the world but should not be strange to us.

As followers of Jesus Christ, when we endure hardship, our response should be joy. Our joy rests in the hope, our hope, rests on the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. As Paul continues in verse 30, he says, *"engaged in the same conflict you saw I had and now hear that I still have."* Remember where Paul is. Paul has been persecuted; Paul's been beaten. Paul was beaten to this very town of Philippi. He's awaiting judgment that could end in death. The word that Paul's using here for the conflict is *agon*, the Greek word, *agon*, where we get the word agony. Steve Lawson writes, "in turn, representing the painful effort expended by athletes in the arena of the stadium where the athletic contests were held. It was where the runners, wrestlers, and boxers suffered great pain and competition." Athletes push themselves to the limit until their bodies were often black

and blue. Later, this word became used for the marathon race, that grueling 26-mile race. Subsequently, it came to be identified with the athletic stadium in which the ancient games were held, such as in Rome and outside of Corinth. It would also be in similar stadiums that the Christians would be fed to lions. Paul's not talking about a brief, superficial pain but a deep agony.

Paul reminds the church of what he is doing. He is calling on them to respond as he has responded. Fight the fight, run the race, do the work. Paul demonstrated this when he first came to Philippi in Acts 16. Remember, he was beaten? He was arrested; he was thrown in jail. The Philippians would have seen this example, he said, and would remember it well. Paul's goal is to encourage this church and to call them to set their minds on the joy they have in salvation, expecting to suffer but confident in the redemption they have in Christ.

Facing opposition, facing challenges is hard. I don't want to minimize that. I'll be honest with you: I don't like it. I don't like to struggle. It's overwhelming. But much like we hear throughout the New Testament, we grow because of these trials and struggles. I must tell you, church, in my own life, this has been a challenging week. And many of you know that we experienced the loss of Tara's dad. We started the week with no water in our house. My sweet daughter, Alice, has an ear infection. All this week, I've been preparing to preach on steadfast Joy. And what a joy it is. I've laughed out loud while thinking through this. It's not been a banner week in the Peddicord house, as far as the world is concerned. But as far as how God has provided, He has not failed for a moment. The peace that we have comes directly from Him. The call to cry out for Him is a way that we are growing. It's a way that I am growing. I want to rely on my own strength for so many things. I don't have it. I don't have strength enough. The strength that I have is pretty pathetic. I need to remind myself of that. And this preparation and this time in God's Word is such a good reminder of that.

The Lord has provided for all our needs. He has given us strength, He has given us hope, and He's reminded us of the joy we have in Him. We've been taught to pray for strength each day, and He is faithful to provide. As we become less concerned with our own comfort, and more greatly concerned with our faith and an eternal perspective, we can

see growth. This is the steadfast calling. Steadfast in community, steadfast in courage, steadfast in calling.

I want to share a song with you is written by John Newton. It's just dealing with some of the challenges we've been going through and the growth we've been going through. My wife pointed this out to me. She said, "I want you to hear this song. It fits so well with what you're planning to preach on and what we're enduring, what we're going through." The song fits this passage so well. It's a song called "I Asked the Lord that I Might Grow." I'm gonna read it to you, and hear the lyrics as we go. It says,

I asked the Lord that I might grow / In faith, and love, and every grace; / Might more of His salvation know, / And seek, more earnestly, His face. / 'Twas He who taught me thus to pray, / And He, I trust, has answered prayer! / But it has been in such a way, / As almost drove me to despair. / I hoped that in some favored hour, / At once He'd answer my request; / And by His love's constraining pow'r, / Subdue my sins, and give me rest. / Instead of this, He made me feel / The hidden evils of my heart; / And let the angry pow'rs of hell / Assault my soul in every part. / Yea more, with His own hand He seemed / Intent to aggravate my woe; / Crossed all the fair designs I schemed, / Blasted my gourds, and laid me low. / Lord, why is this, I trembling cried, / Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death? / "Tis in this way," the Lord replied, / "I answer prayer for grace and faith. / These inward trials I employ, From self, and pride, to set thee free; / And break thy schemes of earthly joy, / That thou may'st find thy all in Me."

As we look back through this portion of Scripture, we see how it's our responsibility to respond to God's Word through a steadfast community, a steadfast courage, and a steadfast calling. Church, how are we in community? What does your community look like? How are we standing together? Are we steadfast in standing? Are we standing strong? Who are you encouraging? How are you encouraging? Where are you in Scripture? What does that look like on a daily basis? How do you guard your time in God's Word? There's nothing more important in your day. Set aside that time, guard that time. If something else is creeping in on that time that something else needs to change. Don't compromise there.

How are you in community? How are you with other believers? If you're not, you're missing it. You've been called to be here. You've been called to be in community. You're not called to sneak in and sneak away. You're called to be here. Be a part of the body. Encourage one another; be encouraged by one another.

How's your courage? Where do you find your courage? Are you trembling? Are you terrified? In which ways are you standing strong? You would have no idea the encouragement you might be to others by overcoming that fear, standing strong in God's Word, not on your own strength. Your own strength will fail. I assure you, your own strength won't hold out.

Are we being steadfast in our calling, our calling to be blessed? What a blessing it is to have salvation in the Lord. What joy it is to have that salvation and to be able to speak on it and share with others. But what joy it is to suffer. We don't like suffering. We don't know suffering. But we should suffer for the sake of the one true God, the one who gave us that salvation. That's why we suffer. That's why we should be able to accept that suffering and rejoice together in that community with courage, because of that.

Let's pray.

Gracious and merciful God, we praise you for who you are and for your steadfast love for us. We praise you for saving us from our sins. Thank you for the gift of salvation. Thank you that it's not based on what we do, that we don't have to try to find a way to bring about our own salvation, Lord. We have no means to do so. Help us to remember that, Lord. Help us to have a greater view of you and a smaller view of us. Help us to move from forgetfulness to faithfulness. Help us to respond to the salvation we now have by suffering for the gospel and standing firm in your truth. Help us to know your Word and desire it. Help us to stand together as a community that we might be a blessing to those who see us. Help us not to be conformed to the pattern of this world around us, but to be transformed as a people, seeking you and your righteousness. We love you, Lord, and it's your name I pray. Amen.