

THE POWER OF A POSITIVE TESTIMONY (Philippians 4:1-5)

In 1952, the pastor and author Norman Vincent Peale, released a book entitled, *The Power of Positive Thinking*. His book spent 186 weeks on the New York Times best-seller list, and 48 of those weeks it was the number 1 non-fiction book in the country. Many years later, Peale published another book called, *The Power of Positive Living*.

The longtime pastor of the FBC of Houston, John Bisagno, must have been thinking of Peale's book when in 1965 he wrote, *The Power of Positive Praying*. He wrote some other books with similar titles: *The Power of Positive Preaching to the Lost* and *The Power of Positive Giving*.

There have been other authors who have copied Peale's title. If you go to Amazon, you can find: *The Power of Positive Leadership*, *The Power of Positive Parenting*, *The Power of Positive Dog Training*, and many other similar titles.

I'm going to join the bandwagon. The title of today's message is, "The Power of a Positive Testimony." I have attended church all of my life. Through the years, I have heard thrilling testimonies from some about how God saved them from destructive addictions or terrible circumstances and have given them victory. I have heard the testimony of former drug addicts, former alcoholics, former members of the mafia, and ex-cons. I have also heard the testimony of people who were healed by God of cancer or another terminal disease. I have read books written by people who died and God brought them back to life. All of these people have a story to tell of God's saving power.

As wonderful and as exciting as these stories are to hear, it is possible for people like me to feel a bit deflated. I was saved when I was 8-years-old. At the time I was saved, I didn't have a drug or alcohol addiction. I had not been to prison, and I wasn't involved in the mafia. Since I've been saved, I've never been diagnosed with and healed of cancer nor have I ever come back from the dead. Now, there have been times I have felt like I was going to die, but that's not quite the same.

How many of you were saved when you were young? How many of you have been attending church almost all of your life? I want you to know that you have a wonderful testimony! While your sins may not have been as dramatic, you had still sinned, and at some point, you recognized that you were a sinner. Knowing that you were in need of a Savior, you cried out to Jesus to save you. Not only did Jesus save you, He kept you from the muck and mire of a harmful and shameful lifestyle. While He has saved some people out of that, glory be to God, He saved you from that! That is no small thing.

Today, however, I want to talk about a different kind of testimony. All of those testimonies are personal. They are what God did for you as an individual. They are also, salvation testimonies; they tell the story of how you came to Christ.

From today's text, I want to talk about a corporate testimony, about what God can say to others through the lives we live after coming to Christ. Let's look at Philippians 4:1-5.

Three times in these five verses, Paul uses the phrase "in the Lord." The Church at Philippi, and I believe the Church of Liberty Southern, and the Church of First Baptist, and the Church of Emmanuel Enid, and the entire Church of God everywhere and at

every time are called upon to stand firm in the Lord, and to agree in the Lord, and to rejoice in the Lord.

I am convinced that when we do those very things, we offer a strong and powerful testimony to our world concerning the truth and reality of Jesus Christ.

We Have a Powerful Testimony When We Stand Firm; So, Let There Be No Compromise

Last Sunday's message included v. 1, but we are going to return to it because this verse is a transitional verse. Not only does it conclude what Paul had been talking about, it also introduces what comes next. In that latter part of chapter 3, Paul says we are to live in this world as citizens of heaven. If we are going to succeed in doing so, we must stand firm. Now, since we are to stand firm, he shows us some ways we can do that.

We are going to get to some of those ways in a moment, but I want us to consider again this command to stand firm. As we said last week, Paul is employing military language. We are to dig in and hold the ground that Jesus has won on our behalf. This is the same idea of 3:16. Don't cede ground to the enemy that you have already occupied. If you have learned to pray, then don't quit praying. If you have established a habit of reading the Bible, keep at it. Don't let that habit slide.

If we are truly going to stand firm, that means we must not compromise our convictions. We must not be silent just so that we can get along with others.

Has anyone ever said to you, something along the lines of, "Keep your beliefs to yourself"? There is a surprising source that encourages us not to do that.

Angel Eduardo is an atheist who argues that keeping our beliefs to ourselves is actually harmful and immoral. He claims that beliefs are the "engines of our actions. They're foundational to how we think and behave, and they have consequences." He confesses that when atheists tell Christians and people of other religions to keep their beliefs to themselves, they don't really grasp what they are asking. He said:

We rarely think about this from the perspective of the believer. For them, every encounter is of paramount importance. They are truly convinced that you are in danger and that they possess the keys to salvation . . . Their proselytizing is a moral act, even when we consider it a nuisance. However misguided or wrong they might be, their actions are motivated by a desire to make our lives (and afterlives) better . . . It's hard to imagine how the consciences of the ethically devout are burdened by every skeptic they've failed to convert . . . How much worse would that guilt be if they'd instead been unwilling to try?

Mr. Eduardo, an atheist, gets it. He understands why Christians must evangelize. Do you? Are you willing to stand firm for who you believe and what you believe?

Some may be annoyed when Christians stick to their guns, when Christians refuse simply to go along to get along. Others, however, silently respect Christians and churches who refuse to compromise. It is often those churches that are growing.

We Have a Powerful Testimony When We Agree; So, Let There Be No Conflict

It is quite possible that nothing hurts the testimony of a church more than the fact that its members fuss, fight, and feud with one another.

Look at v. 2. My version uses the word *entreat*. Other versions of Scripture use such words as *exhort*, *urge*, *appeal*, *implore*, *beg*, and simply *please*. The word is used twice. "Please, Euodia; please, Syntyche. I beg you." These are the names of two women. They have a disagreement with one another. We are not told what it is, and Paul is wise not to tell us; so, we don't need to know. If we did, we would probably take sides, anyway. He begs them to agree with one another in the Lord.

When we have a disagreement, we need to take it to the Lord. Sadly, more often than not, that is not what we do. We take it to someone who will agree with us.

Paul doesn't take sides. He doesn't say, "This one is right, and that one is wrong." He says, "Work it out."

Look at v. 3. We are not told who the true companion is. Many guesses have been made. Personally, I think it may have been Epaphroditus, the one Paul sent back to Philippi, and the one who was presumably the bearer of Paul's letter. Regardless, who we think it might have been, they knew who it was. It was someone that had the respect of the church and who had been a close friend of Paul.

When there is a disagreement between two people in the church or even two factions in the church, it is wise to bring in a third party whom both sides admire.

In Paul's mind, these women were not trouble-makers. They were fellow-workers with him in the cause of the gospel. Now, instead of working side-by-side, they are arguing face-to-face or worse, they might stand silently, back-to-back with arms folded.

Whatever their posture was, it wasn't pleasing to God, and it was a poor witness to their community.

Brothers and sisters, we can do better than that. We must do better than that. With God's help we will do better than that.

In his book, *Laugh Again*, which explores the teaching of Paul in Philippians, Chuck Swindoll includes a parable written by Karen Mains. She paints a picture of a wedding ceremony. At the front of the church stands the groom. He is wearing a spotless tuxedo. He is handsome, standing tall, smiling. His shoes are shined. Every hair is in place. He is awaiting the entrance of his bride. The attendants are in place. They, too, look joyful and attractive. The organist begins to play the wedding march. The time has come.

Everyone rises as the bride begins to walk down the center aisle of the decorated sanctuary. But what is this? The attendees gasp. The wedding party is shocked. The groom is horrified and embarrassed beyond belief. What do they see?

The bride is limping down the aisle. Her dress is torn and soiled. Cuts and bruises cover her arms. Both knees are scraped and skinned. Her nose is bleeding. One eye is purple. The other is swollen. Her hair is disheveled.

Karen Mains asks, "Does not this handsome groom deserve better than this?" She concludes her parable, "Alas, His bride, THE CHURCH, has been fighting again." The

name of her parable is, “A Brawling Bride.”

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5 that Christ loved the Church. “He gave up His life for her to make her holy and clean . . . He did this to present her to Himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish” (vv. 26-27, NLT).

The wedding could begin at any moment. How dare we fight with one another.

Swindoll pointed out the Paul does not lay the blame for the conflict at the feet of either woman. He wrote, “The road leading to a breakdown in harmony is never a one-way street.”

It is interesting that nowhere else in Paul’s writings or anywhere else in Scripture do we read of Euodia and Syntyche. They are found only here. All we know is that they were two women from Philippi who lived in disharmony. Swindoll writes, “That prompts me to ask you: If your life were to be summed up in a single statement, what would that statement be?”

God help us if we were ever known in the community as, “That church that argues with one another.”

People have enough problems in their life already. They are not going to join a church the fusses, fights, and feuds. They can watch that on TV. They get that at work. They are not going to come to church to get caught up in it.

Their way to stop that is to get back to working side-by-side in the cause of the gospel.

In his book, *In the Eye of the Storm*, Max Lucado tells about the time that his father took him and a friend on a fishing trip. Listen to his story:

We arrived late at night, unfolded the camper, and went to bed—dreaming of tomorrow’s day in the sun. But during the night, an unseasonably strong norther blew in. It got cold fast! The wind was so strong that we could barely open the camper door the next morning. The sky was gray. The lake was a mountain range of white-topped waves. There was no way we could fish in that weather.

“No problem,” we said. “We’ll spend the day in the camper. After all, we have Monopoly. We have *Reader’s Digest*. We all know a few jokes. It’s not what we came to do, but we’ll make the best of it and fish tomorrow.”

So, huddled in the camper with a Coleman stove and a Monopoly board, we three fishermen passed the day—indoors. The hours passed slowly, but they did pass. Night finally came, and we crawled into the sleeping bags dreaming of angling.

Were we in for a surprise. The next morning it wasn’t the wind that made the door hard to open, it was the ice!

We tried to be cheerful. “No problem,” we mumbled. “We can play Monopoly . . . again. We can reread the stories in *Reader’s Digest*. And surely we know another joke or two.” But as courageous as we tried to be, it was obvious that some of the gray had left the sky and entered our camper.

I began to notice a few things I hadn’t seen before. I noticed that Mark had a few personality flaws. He was a bit too cocky about his opinions. He was easily

irritated and constantly edgy. He couldn't take any constructive criticism. Even though his socks did stink, he didn't think it was my business to tell him.

I began to see Dad in a different light. When I mentioned to him that the eggs were soggy and the toast was burnt, he invited me to try my hand at the portable stove. *Touchy, touchy*, I said to myself. *Nothing like being cooped up in a camper with someone to help you see his real nature.*

It was a long day. It was a long, cold night. When we awoke the next morning to the sound of sleet slapping the canvas, we didn't even pretend to be cheerful. We were flat-out grumpy. Mark became more of a jerk with each passing moment; I wondered what spell of ignorance I must have been in when I invited him. Dad couldn't do anything right; I wondered how someone so irritable could have such an even-tempered son. We sat in misery the whole day; our fishing equipment still unpacked.

The next day was even colder. "We're going home" were my father's first words. No one objected.

I learned a hard lesson that week. Not about fishing, but about people.

When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight.

When energy intended to be used outside is used inside, the result is explosive.

Instead of casting nets, we cast stones.

Instead of extending helping hands, we point accusing fingers.

Instead of being fishers of the lost, we become critics of the saved.

Rather than helping the hurting, we hurt the helpers.

The result? Split churches. Poor testimonies. Broken hearts. Legalistic wars. And, sadly, [the] poor go unfed, [the] confused go uncounseled, and [the] lost go unreached.

When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight. But note the other side of the fish tale: When those who are called to fish, fish—they flourish!

Brother and sisters, if we will simply fish, we will flourish. Let's evict conflict by focusing on fishing.

We Have a Powerful Testimony When We Rejoice; So, Let There Be No Confusion

Christians who don't rejoice are confused. They mistakenly think that joy comes from what the world has to offer. Many must think Jesus got it wrong when He said that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions because so many believe that joy will be found in accumulating more and more of the world's stuff.

Look at vv. 4. What are we told to rejoice in? Are we to rejoice in our team winning the championship? Are we told to rejoice in our candidate winning the election? Are we to rejoice in our 401-K going up? What are we to rejoice in? Paul wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord."

We are to rejoice in who Jesus is. We are to rejoice in what Jesus said. We are to rejoice in what Jesus did. We are to rejoice in what Jesus is doing inside of us. We are to rejoice in what Jesus does through us when we trust and follow Him.

Notice also v. 5. We are much better at determining what matters and what doesn't when we remember the Lord is at hand. If Jesus comes back tomorrow, you wouldn't be worrying about what worries you today.

There is one thing back in v. 3 that I have not yet commented on, and I have saved it until now because it is something that gives us better perspective. Paul wrote that Euodia and Syntyche had worked with him and Clement and the rest of my fellow workers. Paul doesn't name them. Why? Maybe he didn't remember all their names. Maybe there were too many to list in this short letter.

The important thing is that even if Paul didn't remember them all, God did. Even if there were too many names to list in this letter, God had room for them all in His book, the Book of Life. The Book of Life contains the names of all those who have trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord.

It was common in that day for a city to have a civic registry. Philippi might have had one. It was a book that contained the names of all those who were citizens of the city.

God has a registry of all those who are citizens of heaven. It is called the Book of Life. Is your name there? Let's close with Revelation 20:11-15.