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## Living the Jesus Life: Be the Church, Part 1

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TEXT: Philippians 4:2-5 (ESV)

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

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Dear friends:

There was a man stranded on a desert island for many years. Well, one day he was strolling along on the beach and he spotted a ship off in the distance, and he's very excited about the chance of being rescued. He immediately built a fire on the beach and generated as much smoke as he possibly could, and by golly, it worked. Soon the ship was headed his way. When it got close enough, they sent a small boat to investigate the situation, and, of course, the man was overjoyed. After some conversation, the man in charge asked the man on the island how he had survived all these years on the island. The man replied by telling of his exploits for food and how he was even able to make a house to live in. In fact, he said, you can see the house from here, it's up on the ridge. Well, he pointed the men to direction of his house. They looked and they saw three buildings and they asked about the building next to the man's house. And he replied, "That's my church. I go there to worship on Sundays. I love it." When they asked him about the third building, the man replied, "Oh, that's where I used to go to church."

We're going to talk about church today, and next week as well. We often talk of "church" as if it's something that we simply go to, that the location is what comes to mind – a building – and we will sometimes even critique it as if it's an entity separate from ourselves. But the truth is, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, living with Jesus means that you are the church. You are a member of the family of Christ. You are a key player in the body of Christ. And Jesus wants you with other believers. He loves His church and He wants us to love it as well. Pastor John Stott writes in his book, "The Living Church":

We are not only Christian people, we're church people. We're not only committed to Christ, we are also committed to the body of Christ. For the church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It's not an afterthought. It's not an accident of history. On the contrary, the church is God's new community. Church is what God wants.

Lately, with the Covid-19 pandemic, we've frequently heard this refrain: "we're in this together." And so it is with you and me if we're followers of Christ; we are the church, we're in this together. As we follow and serve Jesus, striving to bring this broken world to Him, and to advance the gospel. As individual believers, an important part of living the Jesus life involves being a player in the church.

The apostle Paul has some helpful instructions on how we do that. It's a list of ingredients, so to speak, that help each one of us to be about the important business of creating and maintaining a healthy church that bears fruit to the glory of God. And we're going to examine each of those ingredients, mindful that every one of us is to commit to doing them for the sake of the body. Here's what we're going to look at the first part of the list today.

First, we learn that a healthy church has unity, it values unity and works to maintain it. Of course, the truth of the gospel must never be compromised for the sake of keeping unity. But, we strive to maintain a unified congregation at all costs... except compromising the gospel, of course. In the Philippian church there were two women that were having a problem with one another. They were at odds with each other, and there is this rift between them. Happens all the time in the church; personalities clash. We're saints in the Lord, but we're still sinners who want our way. And so we'll trample on one another's feelings and hurt one another. And I've seen it a lot, and so have you. Worship wars in congregations over music, we insist on our own preferences. Conflicts

over building issues, decorating, remodeling, ministries dropped or new ministries added. People want their way. Their motto is, "My will be done. I'm right. You're wrong. Let's do it my way." Well, Paul publicly calls these women out by name. Can you picture them blushing as their names are read in the service? What would you do? Anyway, he writes:

Euodia and Syntyche: you two make up. Agree in the Lord, reconcile in the Lord, you're sisters in Christ. Remember whose you are. Take your focus off yourself in order to fulfill your purposes in the Lord. The advancement of the gospel, that's what matters. The church needs there to be harmony between you two.

Forgive and love each other as Christ is forgiven and loved you.

And we learn here that we're looking out for one another in this area of concern if there's bickering going on in the church. Paul asks someone in the congregation to actually help these two women to reconcile. He calls them my true companion, probably a leader in the church, I suppose. But he says, "Help them remedy this situation. We can't have this in the congregation," Paul says, "help them make up. First of all, because they're important to me." Paul describes them as "fellow laborers in the gospel", they're valuable people to Paul and the efforts of the church. They're valuable servants to the cause of the gospel. Let's not lose them. And then their names are in the book of life, Paul says, they're valuable and precious in God's sight. They belong to him through Jesus, like you do, as a fellow co-worker for Christ. Jesus needs every member working to keep unity because division cripples the efforts of the church to reach the world for Christ. And it could destroy the faith lives of believers in the church. It's a serious thing, as Paul says, fix this now. Don't let things fester.

I read this great little story by David Goetz in *Christianity Today* a while back and he tells about a congregational meeting. Two young male professionals made a presentation to update the sanctuary sound system, and the pitch they gave was well-delivered. As they began fielding questions, a retired gentleman (a former engineer) challenged one of the presenters use of a term. I don't remember the phrasing that sparked the fireworks, but the atmosphere in our fellowship hall, which had held a little tension anyway because a sound system upgrade was expensive, suddenly intensified. The young presenter and the former engineer began to quarrel. But who was right? They were the only two in the room. I began to feel embarrassed for the older gentleman since his comment and persistence provoked and sustained the interchange. The discussion ended awkwardly. The congregation voted to upgrade the sound system and the meeting came to a close. But afterwards I saw the elderly gentleman

amble towards where the presenter sat, and later on I heard from others who overheard their conversation. The former engineer apologized for his conduct and asked one of the young professionals out for breakfast to discuss the sound system project. That's what Paul's talking about in this passage that needs to happen. We're going to have conflicts with one another, but let's get them resolved, Paul says.

Next, be in a healthy church, he goes on to say, means that you are a church that has constant, consistent celebration. You're committed to it. He says, "Rejoice in the Lord," and he adds a little more emphasis, "and again, I say rejoice." We're to be people who pull out all the stops when it comes to Jesus remembering and celebrating with all our heart and soul and strength and mind what God has done for us in Christ. We may be saddened or even frightened by what's going on around us or what's happening in our personal lives, but we still are people who are committed to rejoicing in the Lord because we know that Jesus is Lord over the world and has the final word. He deserves our praise. He's faithful and gracious and wise and mighty and very good. He knows us and loves us. Therefore, we rejoice in Him, of course.

Well, Paul is actually, in this particular place, talking about public worship. In Paul's world and culture, this is what rejoicing looked like. There were great festivals publicly celebrating the various gods and Caesar. So Paul is saying, "Why shouldn't we, as followers of King Jesus, celebrate him as our Lord? It's only right to passionately, enthusiastically, joyfully celebrate Him in worship before others, proclaiming the old story of God's plan for the world, fulfilled in Christ, the victory of the cross, the power and promise of resurrection. Hearing the word of God read and preached, and then responding with joy filled singing in praise and prayers." We do this for his sake and for ours as well. You see, there's supernatural power to be experienced as we praise God in worship. First, for those of us who worship and rejoice in the Lord: it encourages us and strengthens our trust and loyalty and obedience to Him. There's a supernatural power that goes to work, the working of the Holy Spirit; whether it's a reverent awe-filled, traditional-type service or one of our contemporary-type services.

It also has power to pull those outside the faith towards Christ because many people are seeking joy in their own lives. That can only be gained through Christ. Each of us has been called in this passage, you see, to not be simply spectators in worship. It's not our entertainment time. The question to be asked each Sunday is not "How good was the worship service today?" over breakfast, but "How good was my personal worship

today as part of that worshipping group? Did I give my all in all to Him, who is my all and all? Did Jesus sense that I loved him?" Because when every person comes with their "A" game, with that kind of attitude, amazing things can happen in the church.

Funny, Paul tells us that healthy churches excel in exercising gentleness: "Let your gentleness be known to everyone, to all people," he tells us. Now that word "gentleness," as it's used here, means having a disposition which seeks what's best for everyone and not just for oneself. It's an unselfish type of attitude that shows consideration to others. It's using gentle words with one another to defuse conflicts or to correct one another or to soothe the pain of others. We're to be gentle in our actions towards others, not just hammering on people and hurting them. While the world tells us to be assertive, Jesus calls us to be gentle. In fact, He described himself that way: "Come to me all who labor and are heavy-laden and I'll give you a rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble. And you'll find rest for your souls." Gentleness brings rest to the souls of those around you. It's the Jesus way. Notice Paul says, "Your gentleness really is a part of your witness to the world around you. Let your gentleness be known to all. May you have a reputation for being a gentle people amongst yourselves; unselfish, considerate, kind and loving."

Bryan Wilkerson tells us wonderful little story, I think, that illustrates gentleness.

Taylor University is a Christian college in Indiana. Ten years ago, they were pleased to learn that an African student named Sam was going to be enrolling in their school. This was before it was commonplace for international students to come to the U.S. to study. He was a bright young man with great promise, and the school felt honored to have him. When he arrived on campus, the president of the university took him on tour, showing him all the dorms. And when the tour was over, the president asked Sam where he would like to live. And the young man replied, "If there's a room, no one else wants, give that room to me." The president turned away and wiped away some tears. Over the years, he had welcomed thousands of men and women to that campus, and none had ever made such a request. "If there's a room no one wants, give that room to me." That's the kind of gentleness and meekness Jesus is talking about in His Beatitudes. If there's a job that no one wants to do, I'll do that job. If there's a parking space that's far away from the church, I'll park in that space. If there's a service time that's less convenient for people, I'll worship at that service. If there's a sacrifice someone needs to make, I will make that sacrifice.

Gentleness. Gentleness. We're supposed to show it to one another, and yet we can be so irritating, can't we, towards one another? Perhaps you've heard this little poem:

To live alone with saints above,  
Oh, that will be such glory.  
But to live below with saints we know,  
Well, that's another story.

And we're to show gentleness to not only our fellow believers, but to nonbelievers, those who even oppose the church and reject Jesus. Again and again, gentleness wins the day and creates a healthy, effective church. And I know it's hard. I thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit working in me. Gentleness is actually a Fruit of the Spirit that God wants to build into our lives. And I can be a bull in a china shop sometimes: a selfish, egotistical jerk. The promise is, though, that He'll work with me as I work on my gentleness towards others. And He'll work on you, too.

Well, there's the first part of Paul's to-do list for us as members of the church. We're running out of time today, so we'll finish the rest of the list next week. But it is quite a list so far. I'm challenged by it. Excellent ideas for being a healthy church, being people committed to keeping unity and loving harmony, being a person who rejoices in the Lord constantly with others. And we treat one another with gentleness. I tell you what, if you're working at creating a community like that, boy, your church is headed towards joyful, healthy, productive days. But how can you and I really make that happen? After all, we know ourselves and our sinful nature all too well. It sounds impossible. Well, on our own it is. But the good news is we're not on our own. That's how Paul ends our passage today: "The Lord is near," he says.

This means a couple things. First of all, it's to be our motivator. This is our challenge or our inspiration. This statement is a hopeful reminder that the day is coming when Jesus will reappear in power and glory and judgment, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, and we're gonna be on the winning team. We have this glorious purpose now to advance the gospel in the world, and the day's coming when we'll stand before Him and He'll say, "Well done, good and faithful servants. What a loving, rejoicing, gentle church you have been for me."

But beyond that statement is a comforting reminder that, as we are in this world waiting, the risen Jesus is here with us. As we draw near to Him, He draws near to us. He said after His resurrection, "Lo, I'm with you always." He's there to call upon as our faithful friend. He's at work in us, through us and around us, by means of His Holy Spirit, empowering us to love and rejoice and be gentle. We're not on our own. Spirit power is the only power that makes the impossible possible. So if you're living the Jesus life, remember: you're not on your own. You are the church. You need the church, as the church needs you.

One last story that I love about the value of being part of a healthy, loving church is from Anne Lamott's book "Traveling Mercies." She writes,

When my minister was seven, her best friend got lost one day. The little girl ran up and down the streets of the big town where they live, but she couldn't find a single landmark. She was frightened. Finally, a policeman stopped to help her. He put her in the passenger seat of his car. They drove around until she finally saw her church. She pointed it out to the policeman and then she told him firmly, "You can let me out now. This is my church, and I can always find my way home from the church."

Lamont comments, "And that's why I've stayed so close to my church, because no matter how bad I'm feeling, how lost or lonely or frightened, when I see the faces of the people of my church and hear their tawny voices, I can always find my way home."

Amen.