

Joining Jesus' Story Week 10: Responding under pressure

This is a series that covers the book of Philippians. **Paul is in prison** because of preaching and teaching about Jesus. **Some view him as promoting something that is anti-Rome.** This was **particularly the case in Philippi** where this letter is being sent to a group of Christ followers. In Philippi, there are a lot of retired Roman soldiers. Someone referring to a king or one to worship **other than Caesar was seen as subversive.**

In Acts 16:19-24 Paul and Silas get caught up in a riot in Philippi because of preaching Jesus. They are accused of creating unrest and teaching anti-Roman practices. They were arrested, severely beaten, and imprisoned.

This is the context that this upstart church finds itself in. They can expect nothing less than this type of **resistance to their message** and even their existence. **Paul has been telling how they are to join Jesus' story and to have his attitude in this context.** Take the attitude of the one **who lowers himself** to serve others, even those who would reject him. **It's Jesus' story, starring Jesus, with you in it.** Not the story of Bill, starring Bill, with Jesus in it.

Let's pick up in chapter 4, verse 2. **I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.** ³ **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.**

⁴ **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.** ⁵ **Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.** The Lord is at hand; ⁶ **do not be anxious about anything,** (I think this is the perfect time to be anxious) **but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ **And the peace of God,** which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ **Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.** ⁹ **What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things,** and the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:2-9

Joining Jesus' story means that in the face of this kind of resistance, even persecution, **the Philippian Christians must respond like Jesus would have.** Paul is challenging them, even in this situation, to have...**A Jesus-like response under pressure.**

Anyone can respond well when the sun is shining, everyone loves you, you had a good nights' sleep, a well-balanced nutritious breakfast, the crowd is throwing flowers, and the press only has good things to say. But if it's cold, you're despised, hungry, tired, and the crowd is throwing insults and threats as the press writes negative lies about you, can you perform well.

It's one thing to be able to **hit that high note, make that free throw, kick that field goal, make that speech, or respond to that hard question** in a presentation in an empty room, **but what happens when live bullets are flying? That's the real test.**

There were some guys who **looked like they were unbeatable in tennis during warm up**, but once you start keeping score, they fold like a cheap suit.

Can the Philippians and can we do this under pressure? Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. Philippians 1:27

Here's how Paul says we must respond under pressure in order to not only survive, but to spread the gospel of Jesus. 1. Put effort into unity.

Paul has repeated this emphasis on unity several times, but without any specific information. Now we have something concrete to deal with.

This is where we get back to the two women with names I can't pronounce. **I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.**³ 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. V. 2-3**

Now we know why he said this earlier. **So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.** Philippians 2:1-4

The method Paul encourages for **unity always begins** with this phrase, **"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."**

Paul encourages these women, **"to agree in the Lord"**...is very much the same language as **"being of the same mind,"** in 2:2.

He calls them, **"true companions"**; this gives the image of being **yoked together**. When two animals are yoked together, they need to pull in the same direction and the same speed. If not, the **field will be a mess**.

This seems to indicate that they both need to **"not only look to his own interest, but to the interest of others."** 2:4

² **I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche**...the repetition of the word entreat or "plead" is to not take sides, but to put it on both.

It seems that these are **key leaders, not just two women not getting along**. This letter is to be **read publically** to the whole congregation.

With these two women and for us it comes back to **looking to the interest of others**. That is the **first step** and then you can actually **remember that you are supposed to be pulling together**. Actually the gospel depends on us understanding that we are yoked together.

Handling the **pressure from the outside begins with focusing on the inside**. That way we aren't **blaming everything on them**.

"I can't really talk about Jesus because it might cause a problem. We just need to wait. Why try to love these people who hate us?"

Instead, we look at ourselves first and not about how hard the culture is making it for us to live for Jesus and present the gospel. Maybe we are the problem. Look for the boogey man inside first.

It's like the woman who complains about the church to her unsaved husband or the kid who talks negatively about the youth leader to his friends. It doesn't really help reach lost people.

This is the challenge, to look in the mirror first. Then look out the window.

This next one sounds so opposite of what we think we should do. We think that if we just get really mad about what is happening in the world that this will help us under pressure. Paul goes opposite. To handle the pressure we must...2. Be joyful.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. V. 4

Show me someone who is overly serious, and even angry, and I'll show you an anxious person. That's how it works with me.

- Playfulness is a sign of not being anxious.

People who are happy, joyful, and playful are seen as airheads. "You clearly can't see how rotten things are right now or you wouldn't be smiling all the time." Also, joy is the opposite of fear. Joy is a sign that we are trusting in God's goodness.

Joy, in the midst of others being angry, sad, or indifferent, is the most amazing witness to the story of Jesus.

But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:13

This next one seems to be completely forgotten in our culture. We think that, under pressure, we need to use power to fight for what is right,

draw clear lines in the sand, and defiantly stand our ground. Paul says we need to...**3. Be known as reasonable.**

Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand... v. 5

The term "reasonableness" or "gentleness" was often used for an attitude of kindness where the normal or expected response was retaliation.

Gentleness, or reasonableness, doesn't mean that you give in to what is wrong. It's that you don't have to be a jerk about being right.

Listen first. Talk second. In our the present context, there is a tendency to ask questions simply to see if it is safe to speak one's mind, because the other person is "one of us." If the question isn't answered properly, then we know that this is the enemy and now we talk about the weather.

Hear someone's story first before slotting him or her.

Burger King customer example...

Being joyful and reasonable will help us with the next one, which is...**4. Be less anxious.**

...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. V. 6

Joyfulness and reasonableness will lower anxiety or worry. These get our focus on God first and on others second.

Anxiousness is about fear of being out of control. I feel out of control and I want to be in control. But joining Jesus' story is about Jesus being in control. It is about me resting or abiding in him so that he can transform my life and live his life through me. You can't rest if you're anxious. There can only be one king. Is it you or is it Jesus?

To positively affect someone's life, you just have to be slightly less anxious than the person you want to help. We will not reach people for Christ out

of anxious fear; it will be out of trusting in the goodness of God and loving others.

Notice that these four are attitudes that Jesus had. He would not do anything that would affect the unity he had with the Father and The Spirit. He rejoiced in what God had created and gave him. He was gentle, like a shepherd with sheep, he asked questions and listened to people who others ignored. He was also not anxious or worried because he completely trusted in the Father's goodness.

We are commanded to have these four attitudes. Which means we are commanded to not resist the Holy Spirit as he produces these attitudes in me. **You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Philippians 2:5 NLT**

So what do I get out of these four attitudes? It seems that these will benefit others and the gospel moving forward. **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

The outcome of all of this is peace. Which is what we need to respond, not react under pressure.

The same language is used for a garrison being placed inside a city for its protection.

Does anyone here need his or her heart of mind guarded? I do. This season of COVID, floods, social distancing, being stuck at home...has wreaked havoc on my heart and mind. I need a guard. **Domestic/sexual violence, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse and addiction are all going up because people don't know how to handle the pressure. When all along, Jesus is saying, join my story.**

There's one more way we can have a Jesus-like response under pressure. You have to...**5. Get your mind right.**

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is

any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things... v. 8

In the midst of all of this resistance, mistrust, and outright persecution, you have to keep your mind right by thinking about these types of things. Yes, it is really easy to pick out what is wrong and what in our culture is not Jesus' story. Anyone can tell you what is wrong, but it's hard to notice all of the things that are right when there is resistance and persecution.

I really have to work on this one. Because I have to manage depression and anxiety; I have to protect my mind. If I look at what is missing, or wrong, or where I have fallen short, it can start to be a snowball that becomes an avalanche. I can't grind on scenarios about what I will do if this happens or what I will say if someone says this...This increases anxiety.

If God's kingdom is coming on earth as it is in heaven then those kinds of things are in our view. If God's authority is being restored, then we will see things that are true...and then be able to think about them.

I want to read a quote that I think sums up how many Christians are responding to pressure now and it's not what Paul is trying to teach us.

In the face of dramatic social changes that threaten the peaceful existence of evangelical piety in our culture, many evangelical Christians in recent decades have adopted a pessimistic attitude toward the world around them, retreating into an anti-intellectual stance. Instead of viewing the natural world as God's creation and an appropriate object of investigation, evangelical Christians have sometimes focused solely on the supernatural. The result has been both a wistful yearning for the supposedly better days of a bygone era and an excited hope that the latest news from the Middle East will betoken Christ's second coming and the end of the world as we know it. Thus, both Christian novels set in yesteryear and books outlining the latest revision of the end-time timetable continue to rank at the top of the religious bestseller list." The NIV Application Commentary Pg. 230-31

This is not a “how to survive this world” kind of sermon. This is how responding like Jesus under pressure so that the gospel, the story of Jesus, is lifted up.

Steps to Joining Jesus' Story

1. Confess our negative anxious reactions.

If this is really something that you can't seem to control, then get some help. There's something that you might need to deal with in your past. **some wound or brokenness.** Also stop making the excuse, “I'm just an emotional person,” You'd understand if you were a parent of _____. If I don't, people will just walk all over me. That's letting us off the hook.

2. Practice before the pressure comes.

In coaching tennis, we call this a pressure point. We put two players of equal ability and they play one point. Everyone else has to pick a player that they believe will win the point. If you choose wrong, you and the player who lost the point, have to run or do push ups. Or pick one player to two straight serves in. If he doesn't, then the whole team runs or does push ups. That's about practicing before the real pressure comes.

You can't put sunscreen on when you start to feel a little sting on your skin or you see some pink. It's too late. Prepare before it's too late and you just have to sink or swim.

There is a card I'd like you to take home. It has this verse on it. Notice the key words are in bold.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Use this verse as a lens to view your day. This is something to do either at night or the next morning about the day you have just experienced.

When did I express joy today?

When was I gentle and when did I instead retaliate?

When did I notice my anxiety level going up? Maybe your thoughts get negative and you complain, or your breathing gets quicker, you want to self medicate with alcohol or something else...Ask, "why?"

Ask God for his help with these attitudes and other requests.

Trust God's goodness and experience His peace. Claim this gift.

After a week of doing this, what did you learn about yourself? **What did the Holy Spirit reveal to you about how you are responding to the pressure.**