

Life's a Battle:  
The Battle for our Relationships  
Philippians 4:1-3

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning. Thank you for joining us on this hot, holiday weekend. I hope you have some plans to cool off later and take in some fireworks.

This morning I'd like to begin a series titled, *Life is a Battle*. And if your life is anything like mine, I probably haven't told you anything new. Most of us recognize that there are battles we face in everyday life. There is a battle for our time and our money and our energy and our vote and our passions and our heart. And the war for these things is waged by the media, our government, our families, our employers, entertainment and even by our churches. Everyone seems to want a piece of us. And sometimes the choices are easy. But many times they aren't. Sometimes there is a clear right and wrong to the choices we are offered; but many times the lines are blurred with "Yea butt"s. "What about this and what about that?"

And yet, there is another battle going on; a battle we experience but usually don't see. And it's a spiritual battle. It's a battle for the quality of our lives. You see, God actually never intended Christianity or spirituality to be a compartment in our life. The battle for our time and money and energy and passions and every other part of us is more than just the way life is. It's more than just a matter of priorities.

If you have a Bible, I invite you to turn to the Philippians 4. The verses will also be on the screen and are on the notes if you'd rather follow along there.

Let's begin reading in Philippians 4:1. ►

<sup>NLT</sup> Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord.

I get this whole battle idea from the phrase: ► "stay true to the Lord." Some of your Bibles might say, "Stand firm in the Lord." Why did Paul find it necessary to tell people in a church to "stay true"? I think it's because Paul knows our lives are the front for the spiritual battle.

Look at what he tells another church in Ephesus. ►

<sup>NLT</sup> Ephesians 6:10 A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we<sup>1</sup> are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

Paul is saying there are influences in our life and in our world that the devil uses to keep us from standing firm or staying true. Even Jesus knew there was a battle for our lives. Look at what Jesus says: ►

<sup>NLT</sup> John 10:10 The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

Life is a Battle, and you and I are the rewards. We are the prize. We are the crown both God and Satan seek to point to. Look at the rest of verse 1 in Philippians. ►

<sup>NLT</sup> **Philippians 4:1** Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work

What is Paul's work? It is helping them stay true to the Lord. And when they do, they are his reward. Seeing them honor God with their life and staying true to who they are as God's children is all the prize Paul needs. And from this verse on, Paul rattles off several things we can do to stay true to the Lord. And each of these things represents a battle of sorts. And we will recognize the battle when we see it. What I'd like God to teach us in this series is that He is in these battles with us and for us because He too wants us to stay true. While Satan's goal is to steal and destroy us, God wants to give us a rich and satisfying life. So let's see where the battle front is today.

Our first battle comes in Philippians 4:2-3. It's the Battle for our relationships. Let's read it and then look at it for a few minutes. ►

<sup>NLT</sup> **Philippians 4:2** Now I appeal to Euodia (*yoo-od-ee'-ab*) and Syntyche (*soon-too'-khai*). Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. <sup>3</sup> And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

Have you ever noticed that sometimes relationships feel like a battlefield? And it doesn't really matter what the relationship is? All relationships experience conflict somewhere and somehow.

I remember being in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. My best friend was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and had about 5 inches on me and 30 pounds or more. We played basketball after lunch every day. I would stand outside and shoot the long ball. He would mow me over for a layup. Well, on this particular day, my long ball wasn't falling and I had had about enough of his elbows moving me out the way. So, I did what any respectable athlete would do; I grabbed him and threw him on the ground. And the fight was on. And because we were best friends, our other friends just stood around and watched. I think I was victorious because I tore the arm off his leather jacket, but we both got sent to the principal's office. Luckily, that was before the days of an automatic 7 day suspension for fighting. By the time we sat and waited for the principal, we were laughing at ourselves and having a good ole time. The principal walked in and said, "get back to class." And this wasn't our last fight or argument. However, as we got older, we learned to fight with words instead of rolling around on the ground.

If you are married, have a good friend or are a parent, you have experienced conflict in those relationships. The question isn't weather or not conflict exists; the question is what we do with that conflict.

So, for the next few minutes let's see what these verses teach us about conflict and what God wants us to do about it. In other words, how can we stay true to God in our relationships, even in the face of conflict?

So what do these verses teach us about conflict? The first thing I notice is that conflict can occur between two good people. Paul commends the work of both of these women. They both helped him when he was there. They both were important to Paul and his work. He doesn't lay the blame at either one of them. And isn't that the case

in most conflicts? If we are honest and when we aren't in the heat of conflict, the majority of conflict has some shared responsibility.

Someone does or says something and you react and then they react to your reaction and hear we go. And then the blaming starts, "Well you started it." "Yea, but you said this or did that first." And we're on the conflict train. Oh, we'd love to blame all of our conflict on someone else, wouldn't we? And some of us do? When conflict comes, our defenses come up so fast, we don't even realize our part in it. It's hard for us to even acknowledge that we might play a role in this conflict. But that isn't the truth. In most conflicts you encounter in your relationships, you play a role. So, conflict can exist between two good people. It's helpful to remember **that** when conflict arises and reconciliation is required. It's helpful to ask or recognize, "What part did I play in this conflict?"

Secondly, conflict happens in the church or in ministry. Shouldn't a bunch of religious church people with God on their side be able to get along? Not always.

After I left my secular job and began working for a church, my unchurched friends asked me things like, "I bet you don't miss the stress of cranky customers?" And I would laugh and tell them, "It's worse at church. There are just as many conflicts in a church. But, at church, everyone thinks God is on their side."

These two arguing women were probably pillars in the church, or Paul wouldn't have mentioned them by name. Sometimes, conflict arises in the church. If going to church is new for you, you will witness conflict and if you hang around long enough you'll be a part of conflict. It's inevitable. Conflict is not the sign of dysfunction. Not in church or your home or work or anywhere else. Ignoring conflict or preventing it at all costs are the sign of dysfunction.

I also see a third principle that is helpful to remember in dealing with conflict. If it doesn't involve you, don't pick sides. Notice Paul doesn't choose sides. Have you ever chosen sides in a conflict and realized you were on the wrong team? I have done that.

When I was in college, I had two really good friends who got themselves into some conflict. And I chose sides. And I'm not sure now which friend was wrong. My guess is they both played a part, but I lost two good friends in the deal. One when I chose sides; the other when I realized I might have joined the wrong team. When we are in conflict, we tend to want people to take our side. We want some validation that we were wronged in some way. And so we lobby our friends with our perspective. But as a third party being lobbied, be careful choosing sides.

So, there are some helpful insights to conflict. But what should we do about conflict?

Let's look again at verse 2. ►

<sup>NLT</sup> Philippians 4:2 Now I appeal to Euodia (*yoo-od-ee'-ab*) and Syntyche (*soon-too'-khai*). Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement.

Now, that couldn't really be any clearer, "Settle your disagreement." Whatever the deal, settle it, take care of it, process it, hammer it out, duke it out. Ok, maybe that goes too far. But Paul wants these women to work out their disagreement.

And it seems like settling conflict is important. The word ► *appeal* and *please* are the same Greek word; it means to strongly beg. In one sense, Paul is commanding these women to solve their conflict. But on the other hand, he is using his relational equity to beg them to solve the problem. It's that important. As Christians, we don't let conflict go unresolved. It's a Biblical ethic; it's the way we live; it's a change we make in our life because it helps us stay true to what God wants for us. Paul even says to settle this because "you belong to the Lord." There is a battle for our relationships. Conflict will always be a part of relationships. And God wants us to resolve those conflicts, Satan does not. God wants to move us beyond our conflicts- to build stronger relationships. God wants us to be free of guilt and shame for causing conflict or dissing someone. God doesn't want us carrying around the baggage that comes with unresolved conflict. Satan would love for nothing more than to have us carrying around the baggage of unresolved conflict.

And unresolved conflict is baggage. In the workplace, it creates less production, higher turnover and more missed days of work. There are psychological and physiological results like stress, depression, increased illness, shame, guilt, tension and more. And we know this. Reality has taught us this lesson; we know the feeling of unresolved conflict. But sometimes we need to hear someone else say it. So, let Paul say it. Settle your disagreements. Don't let conflict go unresolved.

Conflict resolution is important, but it isn't always possible. Because it isn't all about you. It takes both people to resolve a conflict. You may be willing; they may not. Or vice versa. It seems to me there are at least two important components to settling conflict. Number one, listening. We listen to the other person and try to understand what they are saying, where they are coming from and how they have been hurt or offended. Then secondly, we own our part of that by apologizing and asking for forgiveness where appropriate. When two people do this, conflict resolution can be an awesome, freeing, relationship building experience. It is good for us to go through this process.

But not all conflict is resolvable because not every person is reasonable or willing. And Paul allows for that. Look at what he says in Romans: ►

<sup>NAU</sup> Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

I think our Christian responsibility is to try, not succeed. We aren't in charge of the results. It's one of those things we try to trust God with. "Ok God, I am going to try. Make me humble; make me teachable; but please resolve this conflict in a healthy way. Make our relationship stronger through this process." To the extent it depends on you, don't let conflict go unresolved.

But Paul mentions a second step to resolving conflict. It comes in verse 3. ►

<sup>NLT</sup> Philippians 4:3 And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, . . .

Sometimes conflict resolution needs a mediator. And that's what Paul is advocating here. He asked, "my true partner," to help mediate. Now we don't know who the mediator is. But that's not important. I am guessing that mediator is not available today anyway. The point is, sometimes conflicts need a third party. Get one. There should be no shame in getting help to resolve a conflict. Weather the conflict is with a spouse or a family member or an employer or a friend; weather we started it or want to end it; weather we understand the conflict or not, get some help. Get another perspective.

But we don't get help usually. The human way is to build a wall of defensiveness by letting it go. Forgive and forget we say, but we really can't. And with each unresolved conflict we add bricks to a wall of bitterness that isolates us from other people. Involving a third party to mediate isn't always easy, but it is sometimes helpful.

► So, be committed to resolving conflict by listening and owning. And get a mediator when necessary. Because life is a battle. And many times the battle is for our relationships. Satan would love for you to live with unresolved conflict. He loves us to be distracted from staying true to God and what God has for us. He loves to disrupt the rich and satisfying life God has for us. But God says, resolving conflict is better for you. Freeing your life from conflict is one of the ways He provides a rich and satisfying life. Don't let the enemy win the battle for your relationships by ignoring or letting conflict go unresolved.

PRAY