

A Word About Living Well

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] Let's read from the Bible together from the New Testament, Philippians chapter 4, verses 1-9. Paul writes these words, Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

I entreat Judea 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. 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 surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 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.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. This is God's holy word. Okay, I apologize to the one or two from Hope Church Leith who are here tonight.

[1 : 28] You have heard the sermon before, but you've probably already forgotten it. So that's, I don't feel quite so bad about that. So, we did a series recently in Philippians, which is a letter of Paul, Apostle Paul, to a young church.

We thought it was appropriate to do as a young church down in Leith. And so I'm just going to take a section from it, which I think applies to all of us in our lives, about living well.

It's always important to be living well as Christians. And there's always a reason for living well. And there's a link here. If you notice, the first word in the passage we read was therefore, which is a linking word to what has gone before.

And really, specifically, he's been talking about straining towards the prize as a Christian, which is heaven, really. God calls us heavenwards.

And that is why he goes on to say it's important to live well, because we've got this great goal in mind. There's a prize waiting for us as Christians. It's not a prize that we've earned. It's not a prize that we will be unsure of getting.

[2 : 40] It's already won for us by the work of Jesus Christ, and it's awaiting us. Therefore, we have this responsibility to live well and to stand firm in the Lord.

He says, Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm, therefore, in the Lord, my beloved. And he calls them to stand firm because they've got this great prize awaiting them.

They've got this great vision, this great goal, this purpose. I read a book recently by Sir Chris Hoy, who has... Many of you will know who he is.

He's one of our greatest Olympians, cyclist, Scottish. And he has stage four terminal prostate cancer. And he explains how traumatic learning about that was.

But he's pulled... His attitude has changed to a great degree because he is focused on raising awareness, raising funds, and helping other people who are in the same condition.

[3 : 46] And it's transformed how he sees his suffering. It's greatly motivational. Now, I realize that there'll be very many dark days for him. But it's transformed his experience because he has this purpose.

He has this goal. Now, as far as I'm aware, Chris isn't a Christian. And we should pray for Chris Hoy. It's a great book, but it's tremendously sad because there doesn't seem to be any spiritual awareness in his life.

And he seems to be missing that greater goal that transcends and would enrich whatever he was doing in this world. But we have this great goal of knowing Jesus, loving Jesus, and the great reality of victory, even in death, even in suffering, and primarily in death, to resurrection, and to a great hope beyond that in the presence of Jesus.

And that's the link that we have here to this section. We've got a goal. We've got a purpose. That's why we stand firm. And it's important, isn't it, to stand firm? Corey prayed about that.

Prayed about all the struggles and battles that we have and all the way we let ourselves down and we let God down. And the difficulty we have standing firm, when it really shouldn't be for us, if we see clearly.

[5 : 05] And yet, the more clearly we recognize the gospel and the gospel that has provided this goal for us, and the person of Jesus Christ and His grace in our lives, the more able we are to stand firm in the Lord.

So, the encouragement from the Holy Spirit, I hope, tonight, from His Word, is that we'll all be people who stand firm. And the great thing about that is that Paul goes on to explain a little bit what that looks like, what it looks like to stand firm in the Lord.

And the great thing is, it's all very practical. It's not kind of highfalutin or esoteric. It's very practical about standing firm in the Lord. Now, many years ago, probably before the vast majority of people were born who are here this evening, I worked in Peterhead in an oil service base firm called Asco. And I was just a young thing, obviously, if it was that long ago. I was a student who was doing a year out. You worked in a company. And I was a Christian at the time, and Christians in Peterhead at that time were just called good living.

That's what they were called. No one was called a Christian if they were a Christian. They were just called, oh, you'll be good living then. You'll be good living. Anyone who went to church was called good living. Now, there's good, I think, and there's maybe bad elements to that.

[6 : 32] Maybe sometimes people thought you just said to be a kind of goody-goody, a kind of nice person, outwardly moral and right. To be good living. But actually, there's a good element in it as well, that the Christians were recognized as living a different kind of life from other people.

They were good living people. And that's what Paul's getting at here. He's saying that if we have been saved to be children of light, as he speaks about in this gospel, we're called to live differently. We're called to be good living people in our lives.

As individuals, as families, as churches, we've a deep commitment to living out grace in our lives, which makes us good living people. In the right way, from the heart out.

And that's what Paul goes on to speak about here to this young church in Philippi. He wants them to be good living because... to stand firm. And be good living because of the great prize that they were going to look forward to in glory, the reward that was theirs.

And it's very simple stuff. He says... Talks about arguing. Talks about complaining. Talks about being anxious. Talks about... Talks about our thought life.

[7 : 41] I'm going to briefly look at that this evening. So, he says in the first place, he says, don't fight. And specifically, he says, don't fight in church. I entreat Iodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

Yes, I also ask you, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel with Clement and the rest of the fellow workers whose names are in the book of life. It can be tremendously damaging to be divisive in a church context as a Christian. And the Bible speaks a lot about our sinful words or our sinful actions or our divisive spirit or our pride in a church context primarily.

And that's where Paul is encouraging these people to change their behavior. Because the reality is you'll come to challenges in a church life.

We always do. We come to challenges. Which brings us to crossroads. And we ask ourselves, well, how are we going to respond as those who are in him? Because Paul speaks all the way through Philippians about being in him, being in Christ, being a follower of Christ.

[8 : 56] And he says that should change our reactions and our response to difficulties and troubles and tensions within a church context. In him should be the perspective that governs how we act towards one another.

And so Paul here brings out this horrible situation, really, and makes it very public. Two prominent women within the church, Syntyche and Judeo, are disagreeing. Can you imagine when this is read out in Philippi?

They must have just slunk down in their seats. Oh, dear. He's talking about us. And he's not trying to humiliate them because it was obviously something that was very public. And it was well known in the church.

And it was well known. I'd got back to Paul. And he's not exposing it to humiliate them, but to heal the situation, to stop the situation.

They've been great workers for the gospel. They've been important and been founding this church. And their names are in the book of life. And he says, look, get your priorities right, girls here.

[9 : 57] It's important. And it's a great message to us all about how we react and respond in times of difficulty and trouble in our own Christian lives together with other Christians.

There will be tension with one another. And he says, nip it in the bud. Deal with it before it becomes a huge public and difficult issue. If it's not a gospel issue, park it. Just be willing to be wronged in some cases.

Learn to disagree and not fall out. See the bigger picture. Arguments will often happen in a church context. And Paul knows it when we take our eye off the ball. When the gospel isn't that significant to us.

When we're caring about the wrong things and the wrong priorities. When it's all about me. And we forget about the gospel and about Jesus Christ. And about how much we've been forgiven.

And about the great future and reward that awaits us in glory. So faith and worship. And worship particularly when we come together isn't just about God.

[10 : 58] It's great. And it's important that God is the center and the focus of our worship, our public worship. But it's also about our relationships together. And the relationships with one another.

And with one another. And Paul recognizes and sees that. So he says, don't fight. Right? That's one way that helps us to stand firm. Another way is to rejoice in the Lord.

Very famous words, isn't it? Rejoice in the Lord always. And I will say it again. Rejoice. Again. Here is Paul speaking about being in the Lord.

What it means to be a Christian. Rejoice in the Lord. And remember what he's saying and the context in which he's saying it. He's in prison. Paul's in prison when he's saying this.

The great apostle to the Gentiles who's going around all throughout Asia with the gospel and planting churches. And now he's stuck in a prison cell. Facing death.

[11 : 55] So maybe this sermon, this message, would have been more powerful if it was on a screen coming from me in Sochton. If I was imprisoned in Sochton for being a preacher down in Leith. And I was imprisoned for that.

And then I was bringing this and saying rejoice in the Lord might not seem so powerful coming from someone who is living free and fully in life. But he says this.

Rejoice in the Lord. Whatever your circumstances are. And find that there is again a reason for standing firm and a goal that we are called to focus on.

Particularly when struggles are real and difficult in our lives. I'm giving away a lot of things that expose my age today. A great song from the A's.

Reasons to be cheerful by Ian Durie and the Blockheads. Reasons to be cheerful. He had one or two reasons to be cheerful in that song. But we have many, many more reasons to be cheerful to consider our focus in the Lord.

[12 : 57] And it's not a kind of slapstick way of thinking or way of living that denies the reality of suffering or difficulties. But it's to keep a focus on knowing that we are children of God.

And what that means. We are forgiven. We are empowered. We are loved. We have a future. We have the victory in Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus Christ. That's what enables us to keep our perspective.

Even when we're struggling. And when things are difficult. Children of our Heavenly Father. Beloved children. It's a great thing.

It's a great thing. And so it's that whole idea of what our demeanor is in life really. And how we cope. Maybe particularly when things are very difficult in our lives.

I used this illustration before. I'm not sure what people made of it. But, you know, people talk about what's your resting face like. In other words, what's your natural face?

[14:01] You know, what's your natural disposition? And again, I'm not talking about having a big smile on our face all the time. But it's that peace. And that sense of peace that enables us to be able, even in suffering, to have a specific kind of response.

It's that people will look at it and say, why are they able to respond like that when things are going so difficult? Because there's a recognition of who we are. And a recognition that this isn't random and it isn't meaningless, what we're going through.

And that we have a God who has it in the palm of His hands. Even in discouragement. Even in imprisonment. Even in suffering. There's a deeper joy that we're able to know.

Even if we sometimes can't feel it. We know it. Because our strength comes from the Lord and who He is. So rejoice in the Lord. And again, He says, I say to you again, rejoice.

And the Lord is at hand. The Lord is in our lives. So there's that kind of inner disposition that comes from knowing and understanding who God is.

[15:12] Then the third thing He speaks about here is, again, even more famous passage of Scripture. Verses 6 and 7. How do we stand firm?

As we rejoice in the Lord. As we don't fight. Well then, as we pray about everything. We pray about everything. Verses 6 and 7. Do not be anxious about anything.

But in everything by prayer and petition. O thanksgiving. Let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ. Great verse to remember.

Memorize and keep in our minds and hearts. Because it remains the absolute key to who we are. And what we are. And how we live. And how we stand firm. And how we recognize that we have a different perspective.

It's our lifeblood. Both individually and together. It was the same in Philippi. It's utterly crucial for us in Leith. As it is for you here in St. Columbus.

[16:13] That we are people who are connected to the living God. That we have a living, vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ. But in everything, he says. In everything.

The antidote to everyday anxiety. The worries and the fears and the concerns. That we have a day-to-day basis. In our mind. In our hearts. In our lives. In our relationships.

We take it to the Lord. And we fall on our knees. And we say, there's nothing I can do. There's nothing that can make this situation right. But Lord Jesus Christ, I need you. In this situation.

In our fears. In our doubts. In our anger. In our guilt. In our shame. In our shame. In our shame. In all of it. We take it all to the living God. And we speak to him about it.

Over many years. People have said at different times. Pastors say. I really don't know what to pray. And I'm kind of scared about praying. And I'm not sure the words to say. And when I hear other people praying.

[17:09] They're quoting scripture. And they're quoting theology. And they're really beautiful things. They say in prayer. I can't pray like that. Just pray as you talk to a friend.

What a friend we have in Jesus. Just speak to him. Tell him about your needs. And your fears. He knows it all anyway. We can't hide from him. We don't need to have.

You know. High, faluting language. When we come into the presence of the king. Because he knows our hearts. And he knows our needs. And he wants us simply to express. And pour out our hearts.

Before him. And do so. Consciously with thanksgiving. Which is a great thing. Isn't it? It's a powerful practice. Very often I think our prayers are moans. Or complaints.

Or a shopping list of requests. How often. Or how much of our prayers. Do we give over. Both to worship. But and also to thanksgiving. It's a great thing to be able to do that.

[18:07] Because it recalibrates. Our mind and our thoughts again. That we have much in Christ. To be thankful for. Even in difficult and problematic times for us. So much to be thankful for.

And as we do so. And as we lay out that before him. There does come over us. A peace that transcends understanding. It's a protective peace.

I can testify to that. A million times in my life. Can't explain it. It hasn't changed my circumstances. Things haven't automatically got better.

Sometimes things have got worse. But as we pray through things. In a way we can't explain. There is an inexplicable. Beyond understanding.

Peace. That guards our hearts. And minds. In Jesus Christ. You should try it. It's tremendously powerful. If you don't know that relationship with him.

[19 : 05] And the last thing. Which moves on really from. The peace of mind that we receive in prayer. Is the importance. If we're to stand firm. Prayer. Rejoicing in the Lord.

Recognizing the importance of our relationships. And not fighting together. The last thing. Is this very significant. Reflective practice.

Which. Can only be done individually. It can't be done. Corporately. And that is examine. Our thought life. Finally.

Brothers and sisters. 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.

And what you've learned and received. And heard from me. Practice. These things. And the God of peace will be with you. So it's kind of an. It's an explanation of. Or a movement forward.

[20 : 03] From the practice of praying. Into the practice of. Considering. Our thought lives. Hugely significant. Because if. We have a resting face.

That reflects. Who we are. What about our. Resting mind. Something that no one really can see. But. As we'll see. Just as we come to a conclusion.

It does. Eventually. Come out. What is in. Our minds and hearts. So if our resting face. Is our natural.

Relaxed. Yourself face. What's your resting mind? What's your resting. Thought life? What do you think about? The things you think about. That nobody else knows.

Other than the living God. Of course. You know. What is it that you default to. When you go to bed. Or when you sit down. Or when you're on your own. What fills your thought life?

[21 : 01] Now there's a challenge. Something that nobody sees. What is it that. Fills our thought lives. Because it reflects our heart.

And what reflects our heart. And comes into our thought lives. Will come out. Eventually. Spill out. Into our everyday living. Which will often. Cause us.

Not to stand firm. So where is. Your thought life. And where is mine. It's something. It's self-examination. That we're called to do.

In our lives. And to think about. And to consider. And to reflect on. And no one else can do it for you. It's only. You can do it yourself. Are we harboring jealousy.

Or anger. Or lust. And porn. Are we selfish. Resentful. Bitter. Are we dreaming about. Wealth. Or women. Or men. Or luxury.

[21 : 55] Or comfort. That. It's in our thought life. That we really begin to understand. Who we are. And if you're like me.

It's the place you really. Really. Begin to appreciate. Why you need a savior. Because our motives. Our jealousies. Or our pride.

Or maybe. Primarily. Our selfishness. That selfishness. Which. Was really. In many ways. At the core of. The original rebellion. Against God. Exposes our need.

For a savior. That only Jesus Christ. Can change our hearts. That this gospel. That we believe in. Is not the ABC. That we just believed. At the very beginning. Of our Christian lives.

And we've moved on. To different things. It's the A to Z. Isn't it? It's everything. It's that light. Of Jesus Christ. Exposing the darkness. In our hearts. And the longer we go on. The deeper that darkness.

[22 : 53] It becomes exposed. By the light. Because of who he is. So. We have to ask ourselves. Where is our heart? And then we've got to train our minds. We're called to train our minds.

In Jesus Christ. And in the things of the gospel. And in all the good. Whatever's that are mentioned. In this passage here. Consciously. To be focusing on God. And on his truth.

See his hand. In the good things. And in beauty. And in his morality. And thinking about. How he wants. And calls us. To be transformed. In our minds.

And in our hearts. And expose. And move. Away from the selfishness. And the pride. That often. Becomes the motives. For what we do. And consider your motives.

Consider why you do things. And consider. Some of the sins. That you. Are challenged by. And that I'm challenged by. And think beyond. And think under them. And why.

[23 : 49] Are these sins real for us. And what are the motives. And what are the idols. And what are the things. That keep us. From him. Think how much time. We spend. Filling our minds. With. Things other than. The gospel. Of course. In our lives. How much time. Do we spend. Online. And filling. Our. The eye of our minds.

With. What then becomes. Our thought. Life. Asking for a hunger. For. The things of God. And the good things. That he gives us. This would be a great prayer. Wouldn't it? For our lives. Maybe. On a day to day basis. Lord. Just show me. What's honorable. And just. And pure. And lovely. And commendable.

And if there's anything excellent. Lord. Help me to think about these things. In my life. And the great thing is. Isn't it? That although this. Is uncomfortable. And goes into our own minds.

[24 : 42] And hearts. Paul then goes on to say. As he finishes. He says. Practice. These things. That you've. Learned. And received. And heard. And seen. In me.

So this. This. Thought life. That. Paul clearly. Was aware of. In his own heart. Was what. Molded. His Christian character. Outwardly. And. Made him a good example. For others. To follow. And that's a great challenge. For us. Because Paul's not. Paul's a great apostle. To the Gentiles. But he's. Just an ordinary punter. Like us. In Christ. He's a child of God. God. Paul puts himself forward. Not in any proud way. But as he imitates Christ. He wants others. To imitate him. That's a great challenge. For us. Isn't it? That we're to be Christians. Who are so. Confident. In Christ. And in the gospel.

[25 : 39] And in the gospel. Power. And in the Holy Spirit. Transforming our lives. That we. Can see ourselves. As examples. To other Christians. Humble enough. To be able to say that.

Because it's all. Of. Jesus Christ. So we're to be people. Who are examples. To one another. By. The way we respond. To tensions. And difficulties.

Within the church context. The way we. Respond to suffering. And. Our rejoicing. Our prayer life. And also. In the privacy. Of our own lives. Our thought life.

And we're called. To. In Christ. Recognize. His place. In all of that. Because of. The prize. That awaits us. And that is what will enable us. To stand firm.

And. We will always be called. To stand firm. And it will always be challenged. And tempted. Not to. And if you don't know Jesus. Then. Please consider.

[26 : 34] Jesus Christ. And his claims. Not just. That may affect. Other people. But. His claims. That are a challenge.

To you. And to your life. And that I believe. If you are here tonight. And you're not a believer. And you've maybe never been here before. Christ had you here. For a reason. From his word. To consider. His gospel. And the reward. That is. A gift. To us all. When we put our faith and trust. In Jesus Christ. Amen. Father God.

We ask and pray. That you would teach us. Your ways. That you would lead us. And your truth. That you would humble us. By your greatness. That we would always be. Servants. That we would always be. Students. That we would always be. Learners. That we would always be. Disciples. That we would never. Stand on the top of the mountain. With our hands above our head. And say. We've made it. We've done it.

[27 : 31] Help us to. Stand firm. But stand firm in the Lord. And not stand firm. In our own strength. Lest we fall. So we pray. And ask for your grace. And your beauty.

And your love. And your companionship. And your patience. And your holiness. To impact our lives powerfully. So that we may know.

And understand. That we can stand firm. Because there is a great future. For us. Be particularly near to any. Near to any. This evening. Who are struggling. And battling. And afraid. Or far. Feel far from you. And disinterested. Or disengaged. Or fearful. Or emotional.

Lord. Grant them. The ability. To just. Find a place. Where they can pray. And speak to you. And ask. Pour out their hearts to you.

[28 : 29] And ask for your grace. And favor. And faith. And strength. And protection. And courage. That you promise. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.