

# Growing Stronger Together

## Blessing Others • Message 4

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#### Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Pray for unity in the body of Christ.
- Pray to live fearlessly for the Kingdom of God.
- Ask God to show you how you can make a meaningful impact at Brookwood and in your community.

#### Scripture Reading:

*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the Gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him,*

**Philippians 1:27-29 (NIV)**

#### A. Introduction.

I've shared this before, but when I was a high school pastor, there was a leader named Denny Niequest. He was amazing... he had a group of junior and senior boys that were some of the most sarcastic, arrogant, tough to lead kids I had ever been around. Listen, I will confess that most of the time, I didn't give them that much time because they were always causing problems. Not Denny... he was always sitting with them and truly loved them. What struck me most was that Denny was always happy, and one day I asked him... I said, *What's your secret, man... You have the most difficult group of guys in our whole group, and every Sunday, you seem fired up and excited to be here.* I said, *Are you on drugs? What's your secret?* ... you know what he told me, I've never forgotten this... he said, *I find one thing I love about each kid, and sometimes I can only find one great thing, and I start to see them through that lens... and I call out what's good in them...*

See, I think there are really two types of people in the church...

There are thermometers and thermostats....

Thermometers reflect the temperature around them... but people like Denny... they are thermostats. They set the temperature, and the whole church is blessed by them...

It's easy just to reflect the spiritual temperature around you... to go along with, or simply follow the easy thing... but I believe God has called you to be thermostats... to bless and build this church...

And I have this deep belief that everyone in this room wants to be a thermostat... and you go *How do you know?* ... because I have never met anyone who is still holding on to a participation trophy. But in all seriousness, think about all the books out there... on how to find your purpose... unlocking your destiny... purpose-driven life... how to live a mediocre life... I don't know anyone who has ever said to me with joy... *Guess what, I was the last person picked on the sports team...*

We want a life that impacts and matters...

Anyone can go to a small group and just take from it... but here's what I believe God is calling some of you to be: thermostats in your groups, to rise above the spiritual temperature and complacency and live in such a way that your life becomes a blessing to others...

And here's the thing: Most of us just need a vision for this because we've been told for so long that small group is all about you. Sure, it does bless you, but small group is also for you to be a blessing to others, to build each other up and to bless...

And there are three things' thermostats do...

I want to ask you three questions today that will help you move from being a thermometer to a thermostat in your group. So that your life becomes a blessing to others...

## **B. Being a Thermostat in Your Community**

### **Thermostats...**

#### **1.) Live in UNITY.**

**(Philippians 1:27. C/R: Matthew 12:25)**

*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the Gospel*

**Philippians 1:27 (NIV)**

When Paul writes Philippians 1... twelve times he talks about the glory of God, and then at the end in verse 27, he asks for one thing... unity.

Unity is a sign of spiritual maturity.

The word "conduct" is an interesting word... It could be best translated as conduct or walk worthy of a place. Or walk in a manner worthy of heaven.

Some versions say walk, but it implies a civic responsibility and public behavior... It's only used one other time in the bible... and only given to the Philippians.

The reason he wrote this is because the Philippians had pride in their city and in their identity. Philippi was a Roman colony with special status. Paul taps into their pride in Roman citizenship to emphasize their heavenly citizenship.

If you remember from history class...

**Brutus and Cassius (the "Liberators")** — defenders of the old Roman Republic, killed Caesar.

**Octavian (later called Augustus) and Mark Antony** — Caesar's allies and avengers.

They went to war, and Octavian won and rewarded their soldiers with land and **established Philippi as a Roman colony**. So, they had benefits like they didn't pay taxes, rich history. But they had a pride in city and culture...and they looked down on others...

People love where they are from. Texas- Besides God, they love three things: 1) Blue Bell, 2) Whataburger (small cult), and 3) Texas Stars. Four years later, I had hung up a star and thought they had corrupted me.

Some of us take pride in where we live or the teams, we are a part of... Paul says... *Hey, guess where you're really from... guess what team you're a part of...* heaven's ... that's your true citizenship. And guess what heaven values... unity...

The culture might tear down or look down on others, but I want you to be united in love and peace... live into not just your earthly citizenship but your heavenly one. Don't be a thermometer and reflect the temperature of this world... be a thermostat, be counter-cultural, bring heaven to earth...

Paul shows us how to do that in the latter part of verse 27... listen...

*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the Gospel*

**Philippians 1:27 (NIV)**

Standing firm- a military metaphor — like a soldier holding the line. We won't give up on unity.

Striving together- like a sports team working in harmony. This isn't solo Christianity.

Paul is saying this isn't easy stuff. Unity is hard, but spirituality is worked out in context.

Let me ask a simple but very honest question- Is there someone in your life that you are struggling to love right now... someone that when you see them or hear their name, it frustrates you... raise your hand... how many of you are sitting next to them right now? 😊

Some of the people you struggle with are in this church... some of you walked in here and saw someone's face, and you said, *Oh my gosh... When did you start coming here? How did you find us? Weren't you going to move? Shouldn't you, though?*

The person you are struggling with... you can't be like Christ without him or her... you will never be who you're meant to be without them.

Human potential and spiritual growth can't be reached individually. God rigged it that way. Spirituality is always worked out in the context of us, but it's difficult... (raise your hand if you're a difficult person) ... let me clear this up, you know all of us are difficult people... we have all been that to someone else.... you can't expect others to love and forgive you if you don't love and forgive others... Paul is saying that this is what citizenship in heaven looks like.

Unity is hard work. Without unity, a church dies... and you know how I know this—because Jesus said it...

*Jesus knew their thoughts and replied, "Any kingdom divided by civil war is doomed. A town or family splintered by feuding will fall apart."*

**Matthew 12:25 (NLT)**

A church doesn't die because someone attacks it from the outside. It's usually from a thousand little cuts from the inside... let's stand with each other, not take shots at each other...

## Thermostats...

### **2.) Live FEARLESSLY. (Philippians 1:28)**

Remember, I told our church, when you start taking your faith seriously, the enemy will start taking you seriously... you will face resistance.

Your passion and commitment to keep *Jesus at the Center* will cause others to resist or oppose what you believe and say.

But also let me say this to free you... don't be afraid of the critics. Don't be afraid of those who are always looking to tear down...don't be afraid of those who oppose the Jesus inside you... and don't waste your time trying to defend yourself...

*without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God.*

**Philippians 1:28 (NIV)**

The word “frightened” is a strong word- it's a word that is a reference to a startled horse.

I remember a pastor telling the story of his son who was afraid to go to sleep at night. He said his son was scared there was a monster in his room... He said, *Dad, would you pray that God would make me safe...* He assured his son that there wasn't a monster under the bed... but then he said, *Son, I won't pray that God will make you safe... I will pray that he will make you dangerous...*

So, one day he said that his son was on the roof of his one-story house... and he was out there with his wife.. and he said, *Dad, I'm going to jump...* he said his wife was like... *Don't listen to your dad, he's crazy, go back inside...* then his son said, *Dad, I'm ready to be dangerous... I'm ready to jump.* And he took a while, he looked, then he jumped... and broke his arm... No, he jumped, and his dad caught him... but I've never forgotten that...

Church, I don't pray for you to be safe. I pray that God makes you dangerous and that you live radically for him.

Parents don't pray for your children's safety or future alone... pray for their souls... that God would make them a wrecking ball in their faith...

The most repeated command is fear not... one of the greatest gifts you can give your family and community is to be grounded and rooted deep in Christ so that you aren't afraid...

Think about it... the most powerful person on the planet has your back... he is with you. Why waste your time dealing with critics or those who oppose you? Don't let those who love to grumble and complain steal your joy...

Do you know how much a person who is living fearlessly can change a community? It's contagious because it doesn't make sense. Don't spend your one life afraid of everything... Jesus wins in the end. Play the game free and fearlessly.

And when you find yourself afraid, can I encourage you to worship? Do you realize how powerful worship is? Think about this verse... when you face difficulties, can I encourage you to worship God?... when you do, you remind yourself of the truth, but also, according to this verse, you remind the enemy that he's been defeated...

Some of you, just in this time of worship this morning... you are facing something... something heavy... you're facing something that makes you afraid at first... but when you choose to worship... you literally remind yourself and the enemy that he's been defeated... think how much power our worship holds.

Don't be someone who just stands there... worship and let the spirit of God strengthen you.

### Thermostats...

#### 3.) SUFFER well.

(Philippians 1:29)

Suffering can do one of two things... it can make you better... or it can make you bitter...

*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him,*

**Philippians 1:29 (NIV)**

When it says granted, that's the same root word for grace... it's the idea of suffering as a gift... suffering as a gift? what? Paul, what are you smoking?

But think about it: suffering, when done well, makes you better... but when it's not done well, it just makes you bitter...

A couple of years back, some guys from the church invited me out to shoot some guns at one of their properties. They were a bunch of men's men. There was an arsenal of weapons. They had smoked some BBQ. They were shooting and blowing things up. It was like the whole day was sponsored by testosterone...

But what I loved about this group was that many of them, strong men, were sharing their struggles and pains... one of the guys, as he was sharing, said that one of his biggest hardships had become the biggest catalyst to his faith... because he suffered well, he blessed this entire small group of people.

I thought about that. Had he not suffered well, he would have just made that group toxic, or miserable, or bitter, or surface level... but because he had suffered well, he was a blessing to me and so many men...

Think about it: If you are in a group filled with people who just suppress their issues and don't deal with them... that group will never truly have a breakthrough and transformation... but when a couple of people start suffering well and inviting others in, it changes that whole group...

Your life cannot be a blessing because you just become bitter... God wants your life to be a blessing...

What if God gave you a gift to walk through to draw you closer to him, and that thing that was once the greatest setback in your life becomes your greatest testimony of the power and healing of God...

I remember one of the first times in a group I started to share my struggles, and when I did, I felt vulnerable. But there was another guy in the group, and he started sharing his struggles. He told me and the rest of the group all of his struggles and sins. When he got done sharing... I looked at him and said, *You're sick, man. You need help.* 😊 No, I said, *Thanks for your courage*, and it began to free me and changed our group...