

THE POWER OF COOPERATIVE FAITH:
Guarding against the bandits of our marriages
Phil. 4.1-7

INTRODUCTION: We live in the age of electronic bandits – identity thieves that are working around the clock to steal our identity. I have had both my and my father’s social security numbers compromised. I found out my dad’s had been compromised after we filed his last tax return after he died. We were informed by the IRS that someone had stolen his SSN and had filed a false return, took about 18 months to settle. We never knew who it was, all we were told is that his SSN was put on a watch list.

My SSN was compromised when the Office of Personnel Management in Washington, D.C. was hacked a few years ago. The OPM handles the security clearances of millions of government employees, and because I held a clearance while in was in the Navy, my SSN was one of those compromised. I received a letter telling me this, and now I have a security monitoring system, provided by the government, that monitors my personal information. I get alerts all the time if any of my records are accessed or is convicted sex offenders move into the area to make sure they are not using my information.

We live in the age of the electronic bandit. I had a chaplain friend of mine in Hawaii whose house was broken into on a Sunday morning, which included his credit cards being stolen. By the time he returned home from church his credit card had already been maxed out. There are bandits all around us trying to steal our identity in an effort to make money or steal money.

There are also invisible bandits out there trying to make a wreck of our marriages and relationships, and that’s what we are going to study this morning. What are those bandits

and how can we equip our marriages and relationships against those bandits that would want to cause trouble and break our marriages apart?

This morning we are going to read from Paul's letter to the church at Philippi about some key attitudes we have to be aware of to make sure our marriages are being protected against bandits that want to destroy them.

[SCRIPTURE]

We're studying this morning what the Bible teaches us about how to guard against bandits that are out to wreck our marriages.

The reason why I have entitled this message THE POWER OF COOPERATIVE FAITH and the reason I have used this picture of a couple holding hands on a beach is very simple: marriage is a lifetime partnership of shared lives – and in order for that marriage to survive and thrive there must be 100% cooperation from both the husband and the wife; anything less is an unbalanced marriage that will struggle.

I, The PURPOSE of COOPERATIVE FAITH (v. 1)

MY JOY AND CROWN: Paul was grateful and joyful at the faith of the Philippian church. He was grateful and joyful because he could see, in their lives, his work was not in vain in the Lord in the proclamation of the gospel to them. Paul established the church at Philippi and wanted to go back to see them again. Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter, so he was experiencing his own trials and difficulties but he could still say, “rejoice in the Lord” because he knew whatever was happening to him externally was only temporary in light of eternity in heaven with the Lord.

IN THIS WAY STAND FIRM: this phrase can be seen both in what Paul had already written and what Paul was writing in ch. 4. Go back to ch. 3 and read how Paul wrote of his singular purpose of pressing towards the call God put on his life, straining forward in his faith, in his singular purpose of living for the Lord a life that honors Him. Paul is also encouraging them here in ch. 4 to be of a singular purpose of standing firm in their faith through a cooperative attitude of praise and thanksgiving.

In this one verse Paul praises and thanks God for the faith of the Philippian church. We should always be praising God for the faith of church members. As we see God growing people, we should rejoice in their progress in the gospel.

And not only should we be praising and thanking God for the faith of church members, we should and must be praising and thanking God for the faith in our own families. Let your wife know how much it makes you thankful because you see her growing in her faith; let your husband know how much it makes you thankful because you see him growing in his faith. When we pay attention to each other and let each other know how much we appreciate how they are growing in their faith, then we are helping each other stand firm in our faith.

Remember, marriages are stronger together than they are apart, but in order for that to happen, husbands and wives have to be paying attention to each other.

In his book *Love and Respect*, Dr. Emerson Eggerichs wrote that for men, face time with their wives is extremely important. He wrote that, “face-to-face time is heart-to-heart time¹” when husbands spend time listening to their wives. This is the best time, husbands, for you to complement and praise your wife because of how God is growing her in her faith. And by

¹ Emerson Eggerichs, *Love and Respect* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2004), 126-27.

the way, when you do this she knows you are paying attention, and that increases her love and respect for you.

The PURPOSE of cooperative faith is to help each other stand together in their faith.

II. The PARTS of COOPERATIVE FAITH

In vv. 2-7 there are seven different attitudes and actions that can be bandits in our marriages if we are not paying attention. So here we go:

a, Harmony

v. 2

We have no idea who Euodia and Syntyche were and we have no idea what their issues were, but I have always said, how said it is that their disagreement was so bad Paul wrote about it and for all eternity now these two women are only known for their disagreement.

LIVE IN HARMONY: to have the same mind. Whatever their disagreements were, it was serious enough for Paul to address here.

This is a recurring theme in Philippians:

2.5: have this attitude

3.15: have this attitude

“attitude” is the same word as “harmony”

This word also means to have identical feelings and attitudes towards each other, a total harmony of life².

² Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 241.

IN THE LORD: very important here because Paul is addressing saved people not lost people. Our being in harmony with one another in the church must be according to God's word because we are His children.

Phil. 2.3-4 is key here:

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Can husbands and wives be out of harmony? Absolutely. Think of it this way, are you and your spouse on the same page? That's what the word harmony means.

When Dena and I were looking for a house, we sat down and talked about what we wanted and did want in a house; what we liked and what we didn't like; we also had a price in mind. We looked and we looked, and there would be something one of us would like in one house the other one did not, or there would be a house maybe a little over our price range we liked, but we stuck to our guns and found the house we both liked. We had to be on the same page

When couples are not on the same page the bandit of disharmony shows up and can create a mess, pitting on spouse against the other.

b. Shared struggle

v. 3

STRUGGLE: to labor alongside another person. Paul was actually commending these two women because they had worked hard for the Lord with Paul, they were faithful servants of the Lord because their struggle was for the cause of the gospel.

Paul is asking the church to get involved in bringing reconciliation to this friendship along with his friend Clement. Now the key to the church helping is found at the end of v. 3: IN THE BOOK OF LIFE. This is a reference to the saved of the Lord. The only way any relationship can be healed in the church is because we have been saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the power of God by the spirit of God that helps bring restoration and reconciliation.

Now pay attention to the meaning of that word STRUGGLE because this is what marriage is – to labor alongside another person, in this case, it would be your spouse. Both husband and wife must, must, must be committed to their marriage 100% committed or it will not work. If the husband is not 100% committed or the wife is not 100% committed then the labor is unbalanced and the marriage is in trouble.

When couples fail to labor together for the cause of their marriage and for the cause of Christ, the bandit of imbalance shows up and brings discord in the marriage.

Work together as the team God brought you together to be for the sake of the gospel.

c. Rejoicing

v. 4

you may be sitting here this morning thinking that it was easy for Paul to say, “rejoice”, but Paul doesn’t know your situation. Well, let me again remind you of Paul’s situation: he was a

prisoner in a 1st century Roman prison – harsh conditions to say the least. It was cold, his food was scarce, he may have had to sleep on a cold, damp stone or dirt floor; he was in a difficult situation. But Paul knew that even in the worst of situations he could rejoice because of God’s salvation, pure and simple.

Our marriages are going to go through the good times, and our marriages are going to go through difficult times. But regardless of what place your marriage is in, you have reason to rejoice: you have been saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ;

You have a salvation you cannot lose nor can it be taken away from you so rejoice; you have a roof over your head, food on the table, clothes on your back – rejoice.

You have a husband or wife who loves you and who has made a commitment to walk through life with you – rejoice.

You have a church family that loves you and walks with you – rejoice.

You have been born in the greatest nation on this earth – rejoice.

REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS AND AGAIN I SAY, REJOICE!

What is the opposite of rejoicing? Complaining.

Why is it we are quick to complain and slow to rejoice?

Lack of rejoicing is a very powerful bandit because we seem to find more to complain about in our marriages than we do to praise the Lord about – shame on us!

d. Gentleness

v. 5

the GENTLE SPIRIT means to be kind and compassionate. To be kind and compassionate means to consider the other person, to care for the other person, to not force your will and desires on someone else.

Here is how this works in the marriage:

You, the husband, come home after a long day at work. It could have been a tough day, a hard day for many reasons, and you feel beat down. You just want to come home and relax and leave it behind you for the rest of the evening. And maybe your wife has had a hard day too, maybe she feels beat down and defeated because of something. If the husband comes home wanting his way, wanting to be left alone because his attitude is like a hibernating bear that suddenly got woke up at the wrong time, and the wife does not recognize it, there will be trouble. Or if he comes home and she has had a hard day and she is ready to blow up at the tiniest spark and he doesn't recognize it – as we would say in the Navy “stand by for heavy rolls!”

Our marriages are made up of two people with two different personalities and different ways of looking at life and different ways of reacting to life. If we are not kind and considerate, if we just want it to be about us, then the bandit of self shows up and makes a mess of things.

e. Prayer and supplication

v. 6a

ANXIOUS means to be overly concerned or to be troubled with care. There are two kinds of anxiety: there is the anxiety that is caused by daily concerns, and if we were honest we would have to admit there are times when we get anxious about events in our lives. Then there is the more serious type of anxiety that can absolutely get a hold of your life and make your life miserable.

Let me just say this: anxiety that is this type is serious and devastating. Many Christians suffer with it but keep it quiet because there is a stigma attached to it, they feel like they are a failure because their faith is not strong enough, and we don't help them because we think

something is wrong with them or their faith. The truth is, anxiety within the church is real, and we as members of the body of Christ must be real in showing our love, support, and compassion towards those who are suffering, and they are suffering.

SUPPLICATION is simply making a request of God.

Prayerlessness is probably one of the most dangerous of all the bandits in our marriages. Prayerlessness and the lack of belief in prayer will wreck our walk with Christ and will wreck our marriages. I don't know why it is that when we start having problems we let our prayer life slide and our time in God's word slide – that is the worst course of action to take. When our marriages are struggling we should double our efforts in prayer, double our time in God's word, plead with God for your marriage, for your spouse. Pray, pray, and then pray some more, but believe in the power of prayer.

f. Thanksgiving

v. 6b

Thanksgiving goes hand-in-hand with rejoicing. We have so much to be thankful for in our lives and in our marriages.

Friday is my day to pray for my family and I always start out thanking God for our marriage; I thank God for bringing us together and I thank God for keeping us together. God gets all the credit and God gets all the glory. When is the last time you thanked God for bringing you and your spouse together, and when was the last time you thanked God for keeping you together? That must be a habit in your prayer life without compromise.

Lack of thanksgiving is the bandit of being ungrateful.

g. Peace

I want to simply read a quote here that sums up what the peace of God is all about:

together these words, PEACE and GUARD, refer to the entire inner being of the Christian—emotions, affections, thoughts, and moral choices. This inner part of a person, then, so vulnerable to attack by the enemy, is that which God's peace is set, like battle-ready soldiers, to protect. But this peace that acts as guard of one's emotions and thoughts, Paul says, is reserved for, or available only to, those who are in Christ Jesus. Only in union with Christ, in obedience to His authority and submission to his will can anyone have the secure assurance that he is indeed the object of the protection of God's grace³.

You will never have the peace OF God until you are at peace WITH God, and that only takes place through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And along with peace is this issue of being anxious for nothing because if we are anxious we are not at peace.

III. The PRESERVATION because of cooperative faith

Solomon, nearing the end of his life, wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes, a great book of wisdom that I will begin preaching through on Wednesday nights in a couple of weeks. But listen to what Solomon wrote about how cooperative faith helps preserve our relationships:

Ecc. 4.9-10, 12:

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

³ Hawthorne and Martin, 248.

And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.

CONCLUSION/CALL TO ACTION