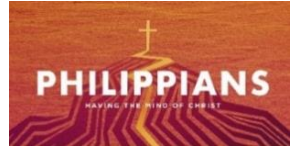


Title: Philippians Part 11: Standing Firm against the Battles of Life

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Philippians 4.1-9

Big idea: We can strong in life's battles when we take both external and internal steps.



We live in a world that seems to constantly be at war. Today it's the Ukraine war going on. When I think of war or battles in war, for some reason medieval soldiers come to mind. I guess my mind subconsciously goes to some Sean Connery movie about medieval times. These soldiers know a battle is coming up. Thus, in a real battle, they put on all their armor.

Battles don't just happen in a battlefield of war, but the battlefield of life as well. Have you ever felt that life is a battle sometimes? That in some area or arena of your life, there is a fight, a battle going on.

The arenas of those battles might include:

- Family conflict
- Toxic workplaces
- Government bureaucracy
- Tight finances
- Poor physical health
- Poor mental health

We all have battles because life is not easy. Maybe today you are facing a battle or two.

When we face battles in life, what kind of help we need?

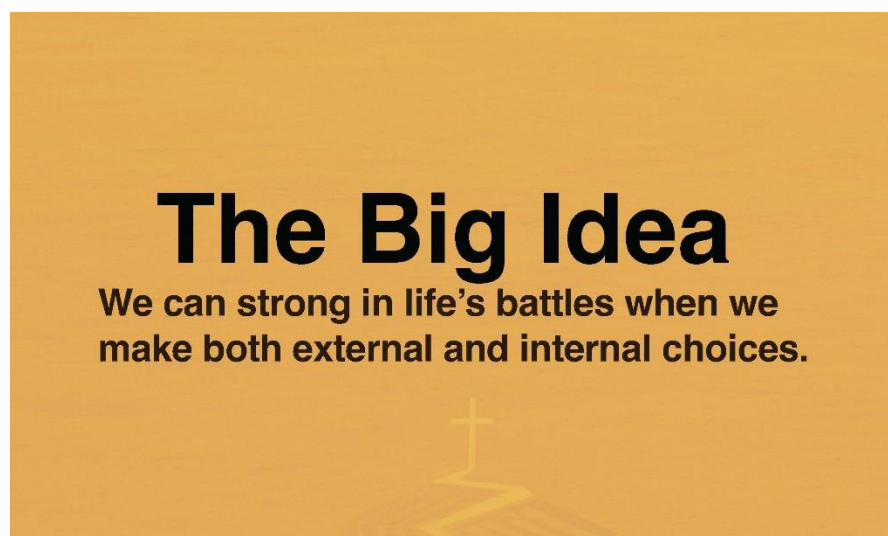
I know I need encouragement, motivation to keep going, hope that I can make it, power to not give up in those battles, and some practical steps to get through the battle.

Today we're going to look at how to stand strong in these battles of life.

The apostle Paul often uses the word picture of war or battle to describe what we all deal with in life.

[Ephesians 6.10-11](#) “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.”

Three more times in the book of Ephesians he uses the word 'stand'. Paul again uses that same image of warfare in Philippians 4.1-9.



To give us a visual hook, I have a big heart here to represent the two dimensions of life: the green representing the outer world, and the white heart representing the inner world of our thoughts and emotions where we internally respond to and process what's happening in the outer world by ruminating or rehearsing over the past or creating scenarios about what might happen in the future or re-directing where we place our attention.

Remember the setting of Philippians; Paul is writing this letter while in a prison cell, 1200 KM away from his friends in the church in the city of Philippi. He loved these people, and his letter is a very personal and endearing one.

¹ Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

² I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³ Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. ⁹ Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4.1-9

Just prior to this passage Paul wrote that he was still in process of maturing spiritually. He hadn't arrived at the ultimate spiritual state, and neither have we. He challenged us to follow his example, reminded us that God's enemies will be judged one day, that God will vindicate us, and He will give us new, pristine, eternal bodies in the next life as we spend eternity with Jesus in heaven.

Then he pivots on the word therefore, as he looked back and says in light of the truth I have just told you, do this

Philippians 4.1 “stand firm in the Lord”

Philippi was called little Rome because lots of retired Roman soldiers lived there. So, when he said stand firm it would bring up in the listener's mind the image of a soldier standing fast in the shock of battle, with the enemy surging down upon him.

That's the image he wants this word to evoke in our minds. Sometimes life surges against us, stuff from the outside and often from the inside. On the inside we experience thoughts and emotions in response to what is happening around us or might happen in the future or in response to something that happened in the past. And that internal emotional turmoil is often the most debilitating and most difficult issue to deal with. Our response to some battles often becomes larger than the battles themselves.

Philippians 4.2 “I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.”

These were two female leaders in the church who were fighting and bickering for some reason not given.

These were strong women as they fought side by side with Paul for the Gospel. Unfortunately, what began well was turning out poorly. They were fighting. If anybody was nodding off as this letter was being read in the church, they were awake now. And these women at odds with each other were probably in the room at that very time as well.

So, here's the first external choice we need to make to stand strong in life's battles:

Get Along With Others.

He pleaded with them to get along and gave the key to getting along: agree in the Lord. Because we love Jesus, we should not let disagreements blow up into fights and battles and disintegration of relationships.

He's saying bury the hatchet with those you have a conflict with. He's not demanding that we always agree in every area. Rather, he is saying to let your shared passion for the Gospel motivate you to work things out with those you have conflicts with. Don't act like little bratty kids who want their own way, or they'll take their ball and go home. Often conflicts are rooted in immaturity and pride.

Philippians 1.3 "Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel"

We don't know who this yokefellow is, but he was probably the one designated to read this letter to the church and apparently, he has the spiritual wisdom and depth to help these women work it out. Sometimes we need a third party to help us work out a conflict with another person.

Here is the next choice we must make to stand strong in life's battles:

Help Others Get Along.

We are supposed to be advocates for healthy relationships. And we are not to only model such health but encourage other believers to get along as well. This sometimes means challenging those in such a conflict to work it out. I don't mean we are to be spiritual detectives, looking for what is awry in other people's relationships, but that we care enough about others and the Gospel that we are willing to help others work out their conflicts and help them get along.

Philippians 4.4 "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Here is the next way we deal with life's battles:

Be Joyful.

Joy is a theme that permeates this book. It's a capacity that God's Spirit gives to every believer to experience true joy in the most difficult circumstances.

Philippians 4.5 "Let your gentleness be evident to all."

Here is the fourth way that we can deal with life's battles:

Be Gentle.

Perhaps he was cautioning this leader who was to help these two women to not use a hammer and to avoid harshness with them as he helped them work things out.

It's the idea of being willing to yield your rights and show consideration to others, easy to do with some and not so easy with others. It's the opposite of contention, but it's not being a wimp. And, when in the battles of a relationship, sometimes the right thing is simply to yield and extend grace and be gentle with that person you disagree with.

Then he gives us the motivation for all this, the why:

The Lord is Near.

He is reminding them that the reason we should do these behaviors is because Jesus is coming again and could return at any moment. Be ready for his return.

The reason we should get along, be peacemakers, be joyful and gentle is that those are the kinds of things we should always be doing so that if Jesus returned right now, we would not have any regrets or any unfinished business with others.

Let's look now at the choices we must make in our internal world of thoughts and feelings.

Philippians 4.6 "Do not be anxious about anything"

Anxiety is that inner mental and emotional state where it feels like we are being pulled in different directions inside. It could be composed of elements of anger and regret about the past, fear and uncertainty about the future. In fact, an old English definition for anxiety paints a great word picture, defining anxiety as to be strangled.

And don't these inner world thoughts and feelings strangle us sometimes? Can't they be debilitating? Have you ever worried about something, and it felt like a scene in a movie that just kept running over and over again, endlessly, and it seemed you just couldn't push the pause button?

To deal with this pain, some people revert to unhealthy ways to push the pause button: drown the anxiety in alcohol, drugs, illicit sex, food, workaholism, cutting, buying, you name it...anything to make this feeling go away. But those choices only dampen the pain for a while. It replaces that pain with another kind of pain.

Maybe for you, you've not taken that extreme road with some of those choices, but maybe you've tried spiritual stuff to make your anxiety and fear and worry go away like prayer, bible study, memorizing scripture, fasting, or spiritual warfare and you found that those disciplines didn't seem to work.

I have. I've tried all those things, and at time I got a measure of relief, but then the negative emotion would come back even stronger. My emotional struggle has not been anger or fear or depression, but worry and anxiety.

Everything spiritual I tried didn't seem to work. I couldn't turn the bad feelings off. Platitudes and practices of, have more faith, pray more, have a longer devotional time, just didn't seem to work. I'm not dismissing those practices at all. They help us grow. I did practice them and still do. We all should practice them.

But I struggled with anxiety until I had an insight that is changing my life. I'm not there yet, but I am light years ahead of what I once was.

I had subtly missed how God usually works. I believe that all truth is God's truth, including science and the laws of nature that He Himself created; gravity, biology-how our bodies and brains work, or the engineering principles used to construct this building and keep the roof from caving in on us. He designed the laws of electromagnetism that enables us to harness electricity so we can enjoy lights and AC and sound in this service.

What I realized as I unsuccessfully dealt with those painful, incessant distracting feelings and emotions as I tried all the spiritual solutions to make it better, I was expecting God to bypass his own created laws of the universe about my body and brain. I realized that often I was asking God to suspend his created laws of nature when I asked Him to take away these negative emotions.

And what do we call it when God suspends the laws of nature? We call that a miracle. I was often asking God to give me a miracle to end these incessant anxious thoughts and feelings.

I had no problem accepting the fact that when I drive from my house to work, I can pray for a safe trip, but the safety of my trip is still through driving. When I pray for a safe commute, I do not expect God to transport me like a Star Trek transporter.

I can pray like crazy for God to transport me, but it's probably not going to happen.

I don't have a problem with God not performing a miracle there, but unbeknownst to me, I expected God to bypass how my body worked when I prayed for freedom from anxiety, and it didn't come.

For example, let's say that someone is struggling with anxiety about what might happen at an upcoming "special meeting" their boss has scheduled for the next week.

They have been rehearsing every possible bad scenario that might come out of that meeting for the past week and their body and brain is now filled with the stress hormone cortisol. When that happens, it puts our brain's fear circuits on red alert and affects our ability to think clearly. It's like they are stuck on anxiety, that DVD scene is looping constantly, and we can't stop it.

Let's say that was me and since I've struggled with anxiety, I may fervently pray that God would make my anxiety go away and I plead for God to give me peace. Will He do what I ask? He can and He may, but He usually doesn't work a miracle every time we in essence ask Him for one.

I'm going to read a paragraph that would describe what would happen in our brain if God gave me this miracle I wanted every time. It's make-believe dialogue of what might go on in God's mind.

"Ah, Charles, I hear your prayer and see your predicament. I think I will suspend my laws of about the biology of your body and brain and give you an instant miracle and make you anxiety free. I immediately eliminate all that cortisol that is flowing in your brain. I force your brain's fear center to go off-line and I fill your brain's thinking center with positive thoughts about your meeting with your boss. And on top of that I will force your brain to produce an extra boost of the feel-good chemical dopamine and flood your brain's pleasure center with that chemical so that instead of anxiety you feel on top of the world."

And poof, I feel great. No more worry. No more fear. No more anxiety.

That would be a miracle for God to instantaneously bypass his created laws of biology. And sometimes God does that.

But most of the time He does not suspend the laws he himself created that work in our bodies and our brains. He often works through his established natural order. Every answer to prayer does not have to circumvent his natural laws to make it a God thing.

When I prayed for relief from these emotions, I was not taking into consideration that God may just as well want me to respect his biological laws of nature, just like God often uses wise doctors to treat our sicknesses rather than suspending his laws of nature to do a miracle each time we get sick or break a bone. He still does miracles, but that's not usually how He works.

Painful and difficult and even debilitating emotions may not be a spiritual problem at all, but a lack of understanding, a lack of cooperation with, and a lack of respecting how God designed our bodies and brains. It could be bio-chemical, imbalances of chemicals in our brain.

God made our bodies with hormones that flow through our blood stream and chemicals that flow in our brain which profoundly affect our emotional and mental well-being. And we cannot just instantly turn them off or get the feel-good ones flowing.

So, a few years ago I began a quest to understand how our brains impact our walk with God, life in general, and leadership.

When we consider how to stand against the battles of life, we will see that the Apostle Paul intuitively understood these kinds of ideas, long before neuroscience was even on anybody's radar. We are body, soul and spirit, and mind and all that makes us who we are and is involved in the spiritual maturing process and standing strong in the face of life's battles.

So, when he tells us not to be anxious, he shows us how to do this. I'm going to complete our diagram here by filling in the inside. It's an A, B, C.

Internally, when we face life's battles, we need to redirect three areas that begin with a, b, and c.

Re-direct:

Attention

[Philippians 4.6 "but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving"](#)

We redirect our attention from the problem, and we do that by prayer and thanksgiving. Did you know that scientist have studied gratitude and thanksgiving and discovered that a grateful heart brings a greater sense of well-being, helps us savor the good things of life, be more optimistic, more likely to help others, have healthier bodies, and feel better about ourselves.

Paul is not suggesting that we ignore it because he next writes:

[Philippians 4.6 "present your requests to God."](#)

So, we redirect our attention, by prayer, from the problem to the solver of the problem, and we by faith give that issue to Him. We acknowledge it and by faith give it to Him.

This verse points to this redirecting of our attention.

[1 Peter 5.7 "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."](#)

We must do that because sometimes these issues and feelings can become our identity because for so long, we have reinforced these negative ideas and emotions through rehearsal, rumination, and inner commentary.

It's those DVD scenes constantly looping in our minds. The more we listen to them and watch them in our minds, the more we identify with them. You see, we think up to 100,000 thoughts each day and when we get stuck in those negative looping DVD scenes. And some of those thoughts and emotions can become us as they get hardwired into our brains.

They can actually become the themes in our mind, I'm ugly, I'm fat, I'm skinny, I'm stupid, I'm a loser, she hates me, life is hopeless, I can't do anything right, they are talking about me, etc.

It's like how a river becomes a river. It starts as a little rivulet then a stream then a creek and finally it grows to become a river. Over time it deepens its channel and widens its borders.

The way you divert it is the same way it was formed. You begin to divert that water in a different direction and slowly it becomes the stream then the creek and then the river. Our brains work like that. We can change our thinking patterns just like that river can be diverted.

We do that when we redirect our attention.

But Paul says that something follows when we do this.

[Philippians 4.7 "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."](#)

- It is a peace that God ultimately does give us, just like he gave us his laws of biology of our bodies and brains.
- It's a peace that transcends our human way of perceiving the world.
- It's a peace that God gives as we redirect our attention from the source of the anxiety and give those anxieties to him through prayer to Him.
- This peace that follows will act like a sentry to our minds and hearts.

When that anxiety comes up again, we repeat the process without beating ourselves up. Well, I didn't have enough faith, did I? I must have done it wrong. I must have some secret sin. NO.

Redirecting means when anxiety or other negative emotions rises within us, we don't come down on ourselves, we simply redirect once again.

What he says next is still a part of this process of stopping these negative emotions.

Redirect:

Brains/Thinking

We must not only redirect our attention but our specific thoughts represented by brains/thinking as well.

He speaks directly about our thinking next, what we are supposed to do with our thoughts. Although he doesn't give us an exhaustive list, he tells us to redirect our brains/thinking to thoughts with these qualities.

[Philippians 4.8](#) "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things."

Think here means a deliberate, prolonged contemplation, to let your mind as best as you can, dwell on these redirected truthful and wholesome thoughts.

The key is intention, to deliberately think a different way. This requires that we become aware of what we are thinking about, it's a term called metacognition which means thinking about your thinking.

What we think about actually changes our brain structure. It's called neuroplasticity the ability of the brain to change itself. It's the ability God gave us to change the actual structures of our brain through our thinking patterns. Learning is an example of that. We learn through repetition which is changing the brain's pathways.

God gave us the ability to over time rezone our thoughts and values with repetitive thoughts and action. And it goes both ways. We can sculpt our brain with untruth and negativity or sculp it with truth and uplifting thoughts.

When we develop biblical values and beliefs and thought patterns and behaviors (or unbiblical ones) our brains change to reflect that.

Back to our river metaphor. If you want to divert a river, the best way is to start a new channel so that over time that water flows in a different direction. You don't do it all at once. Just as it takes time to divert where a river flows, it also takes time for these thought patterns to change for you must create new networks, new patterns in your mind.

As we repeatedly redirect our thoughts/brain to these things, God will create this new river channel of truth and joy and peace in our minds. He will transform our minds.

[Romans 12.2](#) "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will."

It's like weather around a mountain. [Psalm 125.1](#) "Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever"

Mt Zion symbolizes God's power, blessing, and protection. So, when we trust in the Lord and redirect our thinking and our attention, we are like a mountain and how it responds to weather.

A mountain has weather around it all the time. The mountain does not become that weather. It, in a sense, simply observes it. In Christ we are like that mountain with all kinds of external and internal weather around us. Now we may prefer certain kinds of weather like sunshine and warmth vs rain or sleet, but we are not the weather.

Your negative thoughts and emotions are not you. They are simply the weather. And bad weather passes.

So, paying attention to our thoughts is a key to spiritual and emotional well-being. Paul didn't know brain science, but the author of brain science, God himself, gave Paul insight about our thinking long before there were neuroscientists.

Without paying attention to our thinking, we can become captive to the changing weather patterns of our lives, our emotions, moods, thoughts, experiences, anything, everything that we have little awareness of, this constant chatter. These thoughts can blind us and victimize us. We can convince ourselves that they are us when in reality they are just the weather in our minds, that is passing.

Our thoughts and emotions are like weather, and we are hidden in Christ in God, our rock, our fortress, our sure foundation. We are like Mt Zion.

Paul finishes out this passage with this.

[Philippians 4.9](#) "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me put it into practice."

Redirect

Conduct

Ultimately, as we redirect what we pay attention to and redirect our thinking to what is good and wholesome and truthful, we will develop character and virtues which will show up in conduct.