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SIDE BY SIDE

Ever had someone else counting on you? Maybe a sports team? For most people, this makes you work even harder to pull through for them. That's how the Apostle Paul continues to encourage the readers of his letter to the Philippians, as he reveals some real-life dilemmas in verses 21-30 of chapter 1.

Imprisoned in Rome, not knowing whether he would lose his life or be set free, Paul makes it clear to his readers that he intends to remain faithful to the Gospel, no matter what happens. He personalizes his thoughts further as he applies them to his readers at Philippi in verse 27: ***Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.***

Paul speaks like a coach or military commander here. He tells us to focus on one thing as good representatives for the Gospel. A team depends on teamwork. This means it's not about you, it's about the team. But it depends on you to do your best for the good of the team.

For the Christian, this means you represent Christ in all you do and say and think. But not all by yourself. You are part of a team, which includes all the other Christians around you, whether you attend the same church or not. All Christians are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit, who empowers you to live for Christ.

The word-picture Paul paints here, as he wrote in the Greek language of the day, is a stampede of wild horses. No matter what mayhem seems to be coming at you from the world, the flesh, and the devil, you can stand firm in Christ. You're protected in His armor.

And your mental game is all important. That's why Paul emphasizes "**one spirit**" and "**one mind**" because what you believe flows out into how you act. Keep your focus on God's purpose, in spite of circumstances, and you can stand firm with your teammates as you **strive** for the Gospel.

The word picture becomes crystal clear with the phrase "**side by side**" doesn't it. You're not alone in this striving. You're side by side with countless other believers who are also trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit in the unity of their hearts and minds and wills so that their lives reflect the strength of Christ Himself.

So instead of being frightened by our opponents, verse 28 says those who oppose us will actually be unnerved by our trust in God, who promises to complete the good work that He has begun in us and through us. We will be saved, because Jesus has already won the contest, and we're just mopping things up.

And as Paul wraps up chapter 1, he doesn't side-step the hard parts. Striving side-by-side isn't easy. He underscores the ultimate perspective in verses 29-30 "**for it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.**"

The mind game gets played out in your body. No pain, no gain. No surprise either, because Jesus promised His followers that they would experience persecution. And He gives special grace to believe in Him and to suffer for Him. Jesus did. Paul did. And you will too if you follow Jesus. If you're not being persecuted, you have to wonder if you're really following Him like you should.

But have no fear. Jesus is not only with you and in you, but with your fellow believers, with whom you advance side-by-side, arm-in-arm, with one focus and one purpose, to stand firm for Christ, no matter what's coming at you.

Paul says, you have this one chance to live today - will it be for Christ ?