

## I. Introduction (SLIDE 1)

- A. The first worship service of a new year. I'm praying we can see each other 52 out of 52 weekends in 2026.
- B. But we are not here to discuss a calendar change; we are here to discuss a trajectory change. You do not need another list of tasks to perform. You do not need more pressure to "do better" or "try harder." If willpower were enough, you would have already arrived at your destination.
- C. What you need is not a new to-do list. You need a new place to stand. And that is my title for my talk today.
- D. If you build your life on the shifting sands of your own performance, your own resume, or your own emotional stability, you will eventually collapse. The storms always come. Today, I want to offer you a foundation that cannot be shaken. I want to offer you a blueprint for a psychological and spiritual fortress.
- E. It is found in a single, ancient sentence written by a man who was intimately acquainted with trauma, violence, and redemption.
  - 1. *"Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brothers and sisters, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved."* (Philippians 4:1)
- F. At first glance, this sounds like a sentimental greeting card. It is not. It is a battle cry. It is the architecture of a mind that has been completely reconstructed by grace. To understand how you can build this kind of indestructible mental and emotional health this year, we must analyze this verse in three distinct elements:

## G. SLIDE 3 ELEMENTS

- 1. AGENT: We will look at the FTP who is writing these words. I'll come back to what I mean by that.
- 2. REVOLUTION: Something dramatic—revolutionary—has happened to the person writing these words. Because when you understand you will realize why these words are so mind-blowingly remarkable.
- 3. INTERVENTION: How it happened, which is the Paradigm No One Saw Coming.
  - a) This is the key. It is the secret to why so many of us are exhausted, and it is the unexpected solution—the "scandal"—that changes everything.

H. Let's begin with the Agent. Let's look at the man holding the pen.

## II. Three Elements

## A. The Agent: FTP

- 1. Look at the biography of the man writing this letter. Before he was Paul, he was Saul. And Saul was not a champion of grace; he was a champion of coercion.
- 2. He was a religious extremist who believed that the best way to serve God was to destroy those who disagreed with him.
  - a) He did not value human dignity; he valued theological correctness.
  - b) He presided over the execution of Stephen, the church's first martyr.
  - c) He hunted Christian families.
  - d) He dragged men and women to prison.
  - e) He was judgmental, violent, repressive, and vehemently anti-Christian.
- (1) In one of this trials, he said:
  - (a) "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities." (Acts 26:9-11, ESV):
- f) Paul's "Past Self" was a nightmare. He was a man whose heart was a fortress of stone, incapable of the tenderness we see in this verse.
- g) So, when a man like that looks at a group of Christian people and calls them my beloved, and my "joy and crown," you have to ask: How? How does a heart that hard become a heart that soft? How does an executioner become a tender hearted friend?
  - (1) Lean in, because if God can change Paul, he can change anybody.
- 3. But Paul isn't the only Formerly Troubled Person in this story. Look at the people he is writing to—his friends in a city called Philippi, a city of the Roman Empire.
  - a) We tend to romanticize the Roman Empire with white marble statues and movies about gladiators. But the reality is that Roman culture was a meat grinder for the human soul. It was a culture designed to manufacture trauma.
    - (1) It was built on slavery: Human beings were tools to be used and discarded.
    - (2) It was built on exploitation: Sexual morality was nonexistent; the weak were prey for the strong. There is no such thing as consent or age of consent. It wasn't even a concept.
    - (3) It was addicted to violence: The "entertainment" of the day involved watching human beings butchered in the Colosseum.
    - (4) It was crushed by poverty: The vast majority lived on the razor's edge of starvation.
  - b) This was a dysfunctional, addictive, brutal world where human dignity was not a concept.
  - c) If you lived in the Roman Empire, you were likely carrying deep, unhealed wounds. You were a traumatized person... even if you were in the patrician upper classes and had everything money could buy.
  - d) So it was for these friends in Philippi. Trauma, abuse, humiliation, indignity was simply a fact of life, and something they had to deal with every single day.
    - (1) For Paul, his traumas were hyper-religious.

(2) For the Philippians, they were hyper-decadent.

4. And this is where we pivot to this room. This is where we pivot to you and to me.
  - a) We don't live in first-century Rome.
  - b) We're no religious executioners.
  - c) But still, we all have our scars.
  - d) If you are honest—radically honest—you are an FTP. You are a Formerly Troubled Person, or perhaps, a Currently Troubled Person.
5. We all carry the scars of a "Past Self." We all navigate a modern culture that, while different from Rome, is still designed to damage the soul. We live in a world of comparison, of transactional relationships, of anxiety, and of pressure to perform.
6. Yes, there is a lot of good. Yes there is a lot of blessing and beauty.
7. But none of that changes the reality that this fallen world is a morally broken pain machine, and you're stuck dealing with it.
  - a) At its core, every mental health struggle, every emotional breakdown, and every spiritual crisis is a breakdown in one main thing:
    - (1) Every troubled soul carries a deep wound that makes love feel really hard.
      - (a) It is a breakdown in love for your neighbor—viewing them as competition rather than community, annoyance rather than sacred beings in the image of God.
      - (b) It is a breakdown in love for yourself—swinging between narcissism and self-loathing.
      - (c) But most of all, it is a breakdown in love for God.
    - b) The ultimate dysfunction is feeling unloved by God.
    - c) It is the fear that if God truly knew you, He would reject you. It is the belief that you are an employee of a religion, not a child of the King.
    - d) Paul knew that dysfunction. The Philippians knew that dysfunction. And I suspect many here today know that dysfunction.
  8. But look at Paul again. Paul has moved from dysfunction to "Joy." He has moved from a hard edged, heartless threat to a man who calls his friends "Beloved."
  9. Explain that.
  10. Okay.

## B. The Revolution

1. Now, look at the text again.
  - a) *"Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brothers and sisters, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved."*  
(Philippians 4:1)
2. If you didn't know the backstory—if you didn't know this was written by a former religious extremist—you might miss the shock of this verse.
3. Paul doesn't just greet these people; he gushes over them. He piles up terms of endearment; he can't help himself. In a single breath, he uses six distinct terms of affection:
  - a) "My Beloved"
  - b) "Longed-for"
  - c) "Brothers and Sisters"
  - d) "My Joy"
  - e) "My Crown"
  - f) "Beloved" (again)
4. He bookends the command to "stand fast" with love. He opens with "beloved" and he closes with "beloved."
5. Do not skim read past this.
6. This is a revolution in a person's soul.
7. The man who once "breathed out murderous threats" is now breathing out words of affection
8. The man who defined himself by his intellect, his pedigree, and his righteousness now defines himself by his love for these broken, former pagans.
  - a) He calls them his "Longed-for." He aches to be with them.
  - b) He calls them his "Crown." In the Roman world, a crown was a symbol of status and victory. Paul is saying, "You are my victory. You are my status symbol. You—the people I once would have judged—are now the prize of my life."
    - (1) This is not just a personality tweak. This is a heart transplant.
9. The ultimate dysfunction is feeling unloved by God... and here...
10. We see a man who has been completely healed of that dysfunction.
11. He is overflowing with a sense of the love of God.
12. You can't fake this kind of affection from a prison cell.
13. He isn't manipulating them. He genuinely treasures them.
14. This is the "Revolution" I want for you in 2026. I want this for all of us. I want you to move from the guarded, defensive, cynical posture of the FTP—where people are threats and God is a boss—to this posture of heartfelt love and joy.
15. I want you to be able to look at the messy, imperfect people in your life and see them as your "joy and crown."
16. But here is the million-dollar question: How? How does a man go from killing Christians to cherishing them?

17. How does a man go from "standing on his own righteousness" to "standing fast in the Lord"?
18. He didn't take an anger management course. He didn't read a self-help book on empathy. He found a new place to stand. He discovered a paradigm that no one—absolutely no one—saw coming. To understand how to build this life, we have to leave Philippi and go to a hill called Calvary. We have to look at the most scandalous moment in the history of the universe.

### C. The Intervention: The Paradigm No One Saw Coming

1. Paul gives us the answer in five monosyllabic words: "So stand fast in the Lord."
2. This is the "How." But if you read that with a religious filter, you will miss the revolution.
  - a) You will hear it as a command to "try harder."
  - b) You will hear it as, "Grin and bear it."
  - c) You will hear it as, "You gotta be a good Christian person."
    - (1) Grit your teeth and stand fast in the Lord.
3. The truth is radically different.
4. The truth is that "Standing Fast" is not about exertion; it is about location.
5. It is not about how hard you are standing; it is about what ground you are standing upon.
6. The reason so many Christians are anxious, angry, and psychologically fragile is not that we aren't trying hard enough. It is that we are standing on the wrong ground.
  - a) You might stand on the ground of proving yourself, avoidance, applause, prestige, denial, apathy, partying, porn, a thousand ways to numb the pain and find a substitute for the love every human heart hungers for.
7. To understand the ground Paul is standing on—the ground that turned a murderer into a lover of souls—we have to go to the most strategically placed episode in the story of Jesus.
8. In all of his teachings, his miracles, his actions of love and faith, in all of the intense narrative of his life, there is one story that is so strategically placed that no one can miss it, but everyone underestimates it.
  - a) If the climactic moment in the story of Jesus was His crucifixion, the climactic moment of the story of His crucifixion was the Thief on the Cross.
9. I want you to picture that hill. It is the center of human history.
10. On one side, you have the religious leaders. They are standing on their morality. They are standing on their rules, their "rightness," their resumes. And from that high ground, they are mocking God.
11. On the other side, you have a thief. A criminal. A man with zero moral resume. A man whose "Past Self" is a total disaster.
  - a) He cannot offer restitution.
  - b) He cannot get baptized.
  - c) He cannot join a church.
  - d) His hands are nailed down; he cannot perform a single good work.
  - e) His feet are nailed down; he cannot walk a single step on the path of righteousness.
12. In his dying breath, this thief does the only thing he can do. He looks at Jesus and says, "Remember me when you come into your Kingdom."
13. And Jesus says, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise."
14. That right there?
  - a) That is the scandal of the universe. That is the "Slap in the Face" to every religious system ever invented.
    - (1) The thief had no legs to stand on, so he stood on Jesus' merit. He stood on the character of God, not the character of the thief.
15. This is the paradigm no one saw coming.
16. Paul is telling us: "That is where I stand fast. I am not standing on my history as a Pharisee. I am not standing on my record as an apostle. I am standing on the radical, free, unearned mercy, the same one shown to the Thief on the Cross, the Executioner of Christians, the Denier of Christ, and every other person who has ever fallen short of the perfect standards of our holy God.
  - a) "Stand fast in the Lord" means to position your entire mind, will, and emotions on the mercy of God in the finished work of Christ.
17. This is the secret to mental health. This is the secret to emotional stability.
  - (1) When you stand on this ground, you don't need to judge your neighbor to feel superior—so you can love them.
  - (2) When you stand on this ground, you don't need to prove your worth to God—so you can enjoy Him.
  - (3) You stop relating to God as a boss you have to impress, and you start relating to Him as a Father who delights in you.
  - (4) The "breakdown of love" is healed because the source of love is infinite.

### III. The Conclusion: The Verdict is In

- A. If a thief with holes in his hands and feet can stand fast in Paradise, then you—with all your scars, with all your baggage, with all your anxiety—can stand fast in the Lord in your situation
- B. So, let this be your declaration for 2026.
  1. This is the year where the gavel comes down and the court is adjourned.
  2. This is the year where you stop arguing with the free grace of God.
  3. This is the year where you stop debating your worthiness and start enjoying His faithfulness.
  4. This is the year where you stop asking, "Does He love me?" and start shouting, "He gave Himself for me!"

- C. You do not need to climb a mountain to find God; you need to stand under the waterfall of His mercy.
  - 1. So stand in the place where the grace keeps flowing.
  - 2. Stand in the place where the love keeps flowing.
  - 3. Stand in the place where the power keeps flowing.
  - 4. Stand in the place where the forgiveness keeps flowing.
  - 5. Where the peace keeps flowing. The joy keeps flowing. The abundant life keep flowing.
  - 6. Stand in the healing streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
- D. Grace is a river that never runs dry, and it is rushing over you right now!
  - 1. Take it by faith.
  - 2. Keep on taking it by faith.
- E. Don't be moved away from the hope of the gospel (Colossians 1:23).
- F. So when the enemy comes—and he will come—stand fast.
  - 1. Don't let the devil accuse you.
  - 2. Don't let your past haunt you.
  - 3. Don't let your problems dominate you.
  - 4. Don't let your enemies wreck you.
  - 5. Don't let your circumstances depress you.
  - 6. Don't let your future scare you.
- G. Stop hunching over in shame. Stop looking at your feet in regret. Stand up straight. Stand up tall.
- H. Stand fast. Stand strong. Stand secure. Stand tall. Stand your ground. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.
- I. Lift your head and look into the face of a Father who adores you! He doesn't just put up with you—He rejoices over you! He is not frowning at your failures; He calls YOU my joy and my crown."
- J. The Thief is in Paradise. The Savior is on the Throne. And you are standing fast in the Lord. The argument is over. The grace is yours. The victory is won.
- K. Let's go live like it!