

## Realign Part 5: Contending as One for the Faith of the Gospel: Unity and the Skill of Differentiation of Self

**Thesis:** Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

**Text:** Philippians 1:27-30

We need to put on and to develop new capacities for what is coming in our culture. This sermon series is about developing new capacities.

Let's read Philippians 1:27-30.

*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 one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28 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. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have (Philippians 1:27-30 NIV).*

*The one thing I would stress is this: your public behaviour must match up to the gospel of the king. That way, whether I do come and see you or whether I remain elsewhere, the news that I get about you will indicate that you are standing firm with a single spirit, struggling side by side with one united intent for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not letting your opponents intimidate you in any way. This is a sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation—a sign that comes from God. 29 Yes: God has granted you that, on behalf of the king, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake. 30 You are engaged in the same struggle which you once watched me go through; and, as you now hear, I'm still going through it (Philippians 1:27-30 NT Wright).*

**Our King wants us to align with what he says, with what he does, and with how he feels.**

*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (Philippians 1:27).*

- Living in a manner worthy of the gospel stands throughout this book as Paul's ultimate goal for the Philippians.
- **Where we are out of alignment, we are called to realign**: *whatever happens [with whatever you face, with whatever you go through, with whatever comes your way], conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the good news of your Messiah, of the King.*

To conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ-- no matter what happens, not matter what we face, not matter what we go through, not matter what comes our way-- **calls for steadfastness, unity, courage, and joy, even in the face of opposition and suffering.**

In this sermon series, we are exploring what it means to live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. We are considering what it means to align with the ways of Jesus in this hour of history. **We want to grow in four capacities of alignment:**

1. **Steadfastness**: *stand firm in one spirit (Philippians 1:27).* (Feb. 7)
2. **Unity**: *contending as one for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).* (Feb. 14 and Feb. 21)
3. **Courage**: *without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (Philippians 1:28).* (Feb. 28)
4. **Joy**: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! (Philippians 4:4).* (Mar. 7)

In our last message, we began to explore the issue of unity in the phrase ***to contend as one for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27)***. Let me try to summarize last week's message. (See the full sermon notes from *Realign Part 4* [here](#).)

1. **Unity**: *contending as one for the faith of the gospel (Philippians 1:27).*
  - a. **Our unity or oneness with each other comes as we contend together for the advance of the gospel [of Christ].**
  - b. Paul envisions the Philippian Christians struggling side by side with one united intent—for the faith of the gospel. They are partnering together on mission with Jesus. **The Christian life is like a team sport, with each one doing its part to help the team win the game or to advance the mission.**
2. **Unity is expressed in the face of opposition and suffering.**
3. **Unity comes through humility** (Philippians 2:1-11).
4. **Here are some expressions of unity** (Philippians 2:2-4).
  - a. *Being like-minded (Philippians 2:2).*

- b. *Having the same love (Philippians 2:2).*
  - c. *Being one in spirit and purpose (Philippians 2:2).*
5. **Jesus is the supreme example of humility (Philippians 2:5-11).**
- a. Humility is modeled and exemplified in Christ by his self-giving love (2:6–8) and the exaltation that results from this self-giving (2:9–11).
  - b. Christ’s life serves as the ultimate example of God’s love and the ultimate model for the outlook and life to which Paul calls the Philippians verse 2:5. Only in receiving Christ’s life as their own will it truly be possible for the Philippians to live the life of unity and humility with each other.

**Now, let’s talk about the skill of differentiation of self as a way to live into unity with one another and to stay connected, even in the midst of diversity.**

1. **Assumptions and core values:**
- a. Each person is important, significant, and created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).
  - b. We need you to show up fully as yourself, in every system, in every team, in every setting, so that we can be whole and complete (1 Corinthians 12:12-27, which illustrates unity in the midst of diversity).
  - c. We need you to play full out and not to become a chameleon or bully when you get anxious or triggered.
  - d. We need you so that we can be complete and complemented (Genesis 2:18).
  - e. We need each other. We were created for interdependence, not to be isolated individualists. (See all of the one anothers of the Scripture. See the commands to love God and to love others like in Matthew 22:37-39.)
  - f. **The skill of differentiation of self is a way to practice unity and to embrace humility in the midst of diversity. We want to work on being defined and staying connected.**
2. **Growing in differentiation of self.** (From [Faithwalking](#) 201.)
- a. **Differentiation of self** is a term refers to an individual who is able to be clearly defined in his/her beliefs, values, and convictions and live into these beliefs, values and convictions with a high level of integrity—even in moments of high anxiety. He/she does this while also exhibiting a capacity to stay deeply connected to those who hold differing beliefs, values and convictions. In the Faithwalking community, we use the term **differentiation of self** as a synonym for emotional maturity. A person who is highly differentiated is an emotionally mature person.
  - b. Have you ever been in a place where you knew that telling the truth was the right thing but you were unable to tell the truth? Or, have you ever

been in a relationship where you knew you needed to set a boundary or take a stand but could not seem to find a way to do so? Knowledge of your beliefs, values and convictions is important. **However, it is emotional maturity—or the differentiation of self—that will empower you to live with integrity into those beliefs, values and convictions when anxiety arises and things get tough.**

- c. **Jesus is the most fully differentiated human being to ever live.** There is some sense in which when we respond to his call to follow him, we are committing to a lifetime of growing our emotional maturity.
- d. **So what was it that empowered Jesus to remain steadfast to his mission in the midst of adverse circumstances? How was he able to consistently display the loving character of God, even as a human being with an emotionally charged body like ours?** We want to suggest that this was possible because **Jesus was able to hold in tension what appear to be two competing realities.** On the one hand, **he had a clear sense of his own identity**—who he was, what he believed and valued, how he wanted to “be” in the world. He was firmly rooted in his identity as the Son of God and remained in action, true to his mission, even in the face of intense opposition. On the other hand, **his sense of identity did not lead him to isolate himself from the world.** **He was able to enjoy deep relationships with those around him—genuinely caring about the well-being of others, listening non-anxiously to divergent opinions, able to work with others toward a common goal.**
- e. **It is fascinating to see how connected Jesus remained to his enemies, the Pharisees.** He continued to engage them in his public ministry, and he even went to their homes to share meals. **In other words, he was able to remain both defined and connected.**
- f. Individuals who have the healthiest relationships embrace and hold in tension the **two competing realities** described above. **They define themselves and they stay connected to those who see things differently.** **Both of these realities—being defined and staying connected—are held up in the biblical images of the Church as the Body of Christ.** For the body to be a body, it must have distinct, separate, well-defined parts that can work together to perform all the functions of a healthy body. **Each part must be well differentiated while also being connected and functioning interdependently.** **The parts must come together and function as a whole in such a way that the distinctive parts remain intact and the whole produces more than the sum of its parts.**
- g. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul describes this principle by comparing the relationships between those who follow Christ to the human body: “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one

body....” He goes on to say that the parts of the body must be distinct— humorously reminding us that the whole body cannot be an ear or an eye—while at the same time asserting that for the parts achieve their intended purpose, there must be an intimate connection between the various parts of the human body. **The Bible calls for unity and diversity—not unity or diversity.**

h. **The individuality force.**

- i. **To individuate (to be defined):** In our different systems, we need to say, “This what I think, feel, believe, want, and need.” We seek to express ourselves with openness and honesty (authenticity and vulnerability).
- ii. **The individuality force.** For the group to function, the beliefs, values and experience of the individual must be expressed and considered. Thoughtful dialogue allows differing points of view to be put on the table and considered, and then a course of action can be charted. A certain level of emotional maturity is required for you to thoughtfully and intentionally declare your beliefs and values in the context of conversations about purpose.
- iii. Effective groups will work diligently to foster this kind of individuality and emotional maturity.
- iv. It is our belief that one characteristic of a high-functioning missional community is that individuals are free to express themselves, fully expecting that doing so will create a divergence of opinion and often become the source for triggering chronic anxiety in others in the group. Even so, this kind of individuality is pursued, and group members are encouraged to freely choose a course of unified action. Unfortunately, many groups will not start out as high functioning, so this is a goal toward which the group strives over time.
- v. **To summarize, the individuality force is the force that you are born with that makes you a unique individual and that when fully expressed defines you as you.** You are expressing the individuality force when you say, “This is what I think, feel, believe, want, or plan to do.”

i. **To connect: the connection force.**

- i. **We choose to stay connected to others, letting others say what they think, feel, and believe, want, and need without fixing them, controlling them, or changing them.**
- ii. **We choose to stay connected while avoiding the temptation to give up self and to hide (chameleon) or to bully others to get**

- our own way or to get them to think, feel, and believe like we do.
- iii. Emotional maturing is growing in the capacity to choose to stay connected, even if others think, feel, and believe differently than us.
  - iv. **The togetherness force.** The togetherness force is the force that causes you to give up some portion of your ideas, your preferences, and/or your desires about how the group should function as it moves ahead. Accommodating the togetherness force means that at some level you become emotionally fused with others in the group. This happens when you give away parts of your self by silencing or diminishing your own thoughts, beliefs, and values in order to avoid upsetting others, or because conformity is an expectation of the group, or because you lack the courage of your own convictions. You also express the togetherness force—or fusion—when you seek (however “nicely”) to dominate others to agree with you or to do what you want. When you are unwilling or unable to stand emotionally apart from an anxious situation, your ability to function as a well-defined self is compromised.
  - v. **We want to be very clear, however. Clearly defining yourself in the midst of anxiety does not mean that you demand your way or that you are unwilling to compromise or accommodate others.** In fact, an emotionally mature person will sometimes decide to compromise or accommodate others but will decide to do so because of deeply held values (i.e., respect for others’ opinions, commitment to a larger goal, etc.) and not because of the pressure to avoid getting upset or the pressure of not contributing to the upset of another.
  - vi. **To summarize again, the togetherness force is that life force that calls you to be together with others.** In the earliest pages of the Bible, it is declared that it is not good for us to be alone. This force can cause us to give up our individuality in order to stay connected to the group. That is not a bad thing. **You will learn over time to notice that both the individuality and the togetherness forces are simultaneously at work in you.** And you will learn to find a balance as you hold these two competing forces in balance with one another [creative tension].
  - vii. **As the group interacts and free self-expression occurs, anxiety will ripple through the system.** Individuals will engage one of the four expressions of chronic anxiety—conflict, distance, over/under functioning, or projection (or triangling). And as

those dynamics unfold—and the anxiety increases—the **great temptation is to give up on charting and following your own course of action and, instead, to find ways to make the anxiety go away.** In fact, one basic idea of systems is that they tend to organize around the least differentiated (the least emotionally mature) member, focusing energy and attention on trying to appease or please or accommodate the person who is experiencing or expressing the most anxious reactions.

- viii. **A well-differentiated person is one who recognizes his realistic dependence on others but stays calm and clear-headed enough in the face of disagreement, conflict, criticism, and rejection to distinguish thinking from feeling.** This person can largely remain rooted in a careful assessment of the facts without having his thinking clouded by emotionality. He can express what he thinks. He can say what he wants and needs. This person has a guiding set of principles and has a substantive level of integrity. That is, he can make thoughtful decisions and then follow through to completion—not because of pressure from the group but because he has the capacity to act selflessly. **He defines himself without being pushy and deals with pressure to yield without being wishy-washy.**
- ix. **Poorly differentiated people depend so heavily on the acceptance and approval of others that either they quickly adjust what they think, say, and do to please others or they dogmatically proclaim what others should be like and pressure them to conform.** **Bullies depend on approval and acceptance as much as chameleons;** but rather than agree with others, bullies push others to agree with them. **Disagreement threatens a bully as much as it threatens a chameleon.** An extreme rebel is a poorly differentiated person, too, but he/she pretends to be differentiated by routinely opposing the position of others.
- x. **A well-differentiated person is able to do two things at once: she is able to define herself by finding ways to say, “This is what I think; this is what I feel; this is what I want; this is what I will do,” while at the same time allowing (and even inviting) others to say what they think and feel and want and choose to do. She is able to do this without either backing down or bullying others; instead, she remains calm, connected to her deeply held values and focused on being the person she wants to be, regardless of how others are being.**

- xi. How, then, does a group manage anxiety by increasing self-differentiation of its leadership? Each person works on increasing his/her level of differentiation while also contributing to and staying connected to the course of action charted by the group—unless this is not possible without violating deeply held guiding principles. **In that case, the individual communicates clearly with the group his/her intention to not participate while also finding a way to stay connected.** Reread this last sentence several times. It goes against the grain of how we tend to think. We tend to want to correct, improve, blame, or judge others, and we use a number of strategies to try to get them to function differently.
  - j. **Summary: There are two forces at work in every system: the individual force and the connection force.**
    - i. We are tempted to only focus on us, and we need to be individuals, to bring who we are to the table.
    - ii. And, we are tempted to give up self in order to fit in. We go silent, passive, withdrawn, distant, reactive.
    - iii. We need to learn how to be who we are [defined; individuate] and to stay connected, without becoming a bully or a chameleon.
3. Growing in emotional maturity is learning to say humbly what we need, what we want, and what we will do.
4. Growing in the skill of differentiation is to choose to make group decisions based on our values and not based on anxiety, reactivity, shame, or fear. Choosing to go with the group decision is not cowardice, lack of courage, or conformity if and we do that out of a choice and out of reflection upon our values.
5. As the members of any group connect and make decisions, anxiety will always be present. Leaders who are growing in their capacity to remain calm (or at least less anxious), thoughtful, and connected will also be helping the group to stay in action and connected in a healthier manner.

#### Call to Action:

1. **Action: Reflect on whether or not you are conducting yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, whatever happens.**
  - a. Where we are out of alignment, we are called to realign: *whatever happens [with whatever you face, with whatever you go through, with whatever comes your way], conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

- b. What is the Lord putting his finger on in your life? Take time to lift up this question to the Lord, to listen, to pay attention, and to respond to the Lord (realign).
  - c. Good news: Where you are out of alignment, the Lord invites you to realign and he gives you the grace you need to change and practice a new way of being.
2. **Action: Reflect on whether or not your life aligns with unity.**
- a. Examen:
    - i. Where are you seeking to promote unity with other believers even in the face of opposition and suffering?
      1. *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1–3).*
    - ii. Where do you respond to whatever is happening with divisiveness, attacking or trying to convince others they are wrong, trying to debate others into your way of understanding the truth, biting and devouring one another, judging others, etc.?
    - iii. In what relationships or responsibilities do you need to express a new dose of humility (teachability; curiosity; be a learner)?
      1. Remember: God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5).
      2. ... *All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).*
    - iv. **How are you doing in practicing the skill of differentiation, of individuating and staying connected, even in the midst of anxiety?**
  - b. What is the Lord putting his finger on in your life?
    - i. Take time to lift up this question to the Lord, to listen, to pay attention, and to respond to the Lord (realign).
  - c. Good news:
    - i. Where you are out of alignment, the Lord invites you to realign.
    - ii. God wants to give you his help and his grace to realign.

This message today is an invitation from the Lord. If you feel condemned or shamed, then you are not hearing the voice of the Lord. If you feel challenged and stirred up, that is good.

We need to practice intentionally in order to live into this word for the year-- **Realign**: *whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

If we are to embody and express outwardly the good news of King Jesus, it will take **awareness** (intimacy with God), **authenticity** (openness and honesty with God and others), and **alignment** (radical obedience; full partnership with Jesus and others on his mission).

Where we find that we are out of alignment, we walk in the light. We cast vision with clarity, authenticity, and passion. We identify our current reality and declare our preferred future in Christ. We get in action to learn skills and to develop new capacities so that we come into realignment.

**Summary:**

The word for the year for us in 2021 is this: **Realign**. *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.*

There will be many opportunities and challenges in this year to see where we are in or out of alignment morally or missionally. The Lord wants to help us to realign, we might respond in ways that line up with the good news of our King.