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PROVERBS 31
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podcast

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Kaley Olson: Well, today, we have our friend, Joel Muddamalle here with us. And you guys know that he's no stranger to the podcast. He's our resident theologian, we like to call him, right. So, we know when he's here, he's gonna give us a lot of history, a lot of context to whatever he's teaching on. And so today, he's here to talk to us about our next First 5 study, which is on the book of Philippians. But the title is what I'm more excited about. It's *How Then Can We Be Friends: Overcoming the Issues That Hinder Your Relationships*. And I hear that, and I just want to take a deep breath, because I know that this is going to be a really great teaching and good conversation today.

But I want to give a little context to this because we're, as we were working on this First 5 study, Joel, I know that you and Lysa TerKeurst and the whole First 5 Team really thought about like: What's a concept of Philippians that we can dive into that will really be impactful for our audience today? And so, I'm grateful that you guys just took so much time to intentionally dive into that. And I'm grateful for how relevant it is. Honestly, we had no idea months ago that we would need this teaching so much today. So Joel, I'm excited for you to dive into these issues that hinder our relationships. And tell us about how we're going to find that in Philippians.

Joel Muddamalle: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I know Kaley, you mentioned that we're gonna do some history and some culture and some background. But first y'all need to know about my history, and my background. And some of you that know me [are] like wait, aren't you Indian from India? Yeah, I am Indian, but actually born in Chicago. And so, here's the interesting thing, that the place of our origin, the place that we're born, the place that we kind of associate with ourselves, it impacts us in a really specific and important way.

For instance, anybody that wants to dog on me about how bad Chicago sports are right now, I just point to the fact that we won six championships with Michael Jordan, greatest of all time. If you can see Meredith's face right now, she was waiting, just waiting for that. And I'm just gonna be honest, y'all. Like I kind of walk with a little bit of swagger. Because I'm like, I'm from Chicago. I'm a Chicago kid. I remember those championships. We had the best pizza of all time, Chicago, deep dish pizza. And you walk with a little sense of pride. And I might say a little sense of superiority, because I don't remember the last time Charlotte won anything.

Meredith Brock: Yeah.

Joel Muddamalle: Right.

Meredith Brock: Like sad.

Joel Muddamalle: So you're probably laughing right now, like, Joel, what are we even doing right now. But what I want to do is point out that the things that are happening in the biblical text, particularly in these letters that we're about to study, Philippians, written by Paul, there are some common themes that connect to our own stories. And so, one of the important aspects about the city of Philippi that Paul writes to, is that the city of Philippi was actually made an official Roman colony by the Emperor Octavian.

You're probably wondering, why is this so important? Well, when you became an official Roman colony, that meant you had all the power, the rights, the privileges, and the protection that came with being a Roman citizen. This also meant that if you lived in Philippi and you were able to get Roman citizenship, you walked with a little bit of swagger. You walked with your head up a little bit higher and your chest out a little bit further and, and you knew that you had the backing of this incredible prestigious background to you.

And then when we look at Philippi and we see the origins of the Christian church, we actually turn back to Acts Chapter 16. Paul loves Philippi. He loves the citizens of Philippi and the church in Philippi actually starts (Acts Chapter 16), it starts in the house of this gal named Lydia, which I think by itself already is super important, that a prominent woman, it's in her house that the very first church in Philippi actually comes about. And here's the other interesting thing: I don't know about you guys, but are all households nice and neat? And there's never any chaos or never any dysfunction or difficulty?

Meredith Brock: Oh, always like that.

Joel Muddamalle: Right?

Kaley Olson: I don't know what families ya'll live in, but that's not mine.

Joel Muddamalle: So this happens all the time, we just overlook this little, tiny detail that this church started in a house. And I don't know about you, but like, I want to ask some questions. Did all of the turmoil within the house disappear just because now it's the location of where church is?

Kaley Olson: That's good, Joel.

Joel Muddamalle: Well, no. In fact, something does change. And the thing that changes is the presence of the gospel inside of this house, that now begins to orient all of these relationships rightly. But again, I want to go back to the citizenship thing in Philippi. It's really important. A household in the Greco-Roman world is very different from what you and I think of a household. So, when I say like, Meredith, can you name off, like who are the people in your house?

Meredith Brock: My husband, Mac. My son, Harvey. My daughter, Cyrus. And my sweet little foster son.

Joel Muddamalle: Okay, so this is really important. Now, you can describe your, in essence your nuclear family and your foster son that has kind of been adopted into your nuclear family, right? The Greco-Roman world did not think about family like that. In fact, it's kind of a Western thing that we think of family and in this nuclear sense, but if you go to India, or many Latin American families and Asian families, there's this idea of this multi-generational family that all lives in one location.

In the Greco-Roman world, this actually expands even further than that. It's not just the people who live in the house that are considered the family. It's also the people who interact with the house. So, it's the people in the marketplace. It's the people who work on the grounds in the subdivision in these areas, and they're all part of the family. Now, here's where things get a little bit tricky. Not everybody has the same status, especially in a city like Philippi. So, you could have people within the "family" that were not citizens. But what happens when those people are now Christians, and you're a Christian? You've lived now your entire life, walking with your head up a little bit higher, because you've got the Roman citizenship, but they don't. If the gospel, what it does here, is it actually demands, it requires of us to change the way that we think about our citizenship, our identity, our belonging, especially within our relationships.

And this is what Paul gets to, I want to read Philippians 3:10. And again, remember this whole citizenship that we talked about, I want you to put yourself in the place of the Philippian people, when they're, when they're hearing Paul say these words. Philippians 3:20 says, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

And so what Paul actually does here is, he says, our citizenship — this new reality of living and being in this other Kingdom that is marked by Jesus, who is the King — it actually causes us to shift and change the way that we relate to other people, particularly our friends, our family; because it's actually a mark of being a part of the Kingdom of God, the way that we relate to other people. So, the challenge for the Philippian people, and for you and I, is that this doesn't just happen with like a snap of the finger. It would be nice if it did, just because accepting Jesus into my life doesn't change the chaos and the confusion and, and the distrust that might be present inside of a family.

So, as we go through the book of Philippians, we actually find that there are four major hurdles that the people in Philippi are dealing with, specifically the Christians, and how they relate to not just Christians, but also non-Christians. So I want to, I want to list these off to you.

One of the big issues of relationship that they're dealing with is criticism. Now, I know none of y'all deal with criticism, and you're not critical of other people, right? But think about the damage that criticism does in relationships. Right? Instantly, it changes the way that you think, to being instantly negative versus positive. And yet, that is actually something that the gospel wants us to shift and change their minds. We're not supposed to automatically think of somebody in a negative way. We're actually supposed to think of them in the way that Christ sees them.

So instead of being critical towards somebody, we want to seek to love and understand them through the lens of Jesus that goes beyond our own thoughts and opinions, but actually the lens of our thoughts and opinions is through the lens of Jesus. Jesus was not critical towards other people, especially non-

believers. He was loving, and in His love, He called them to a new way of being and a new way of living.

Here's another category that's really hard: bitterness. I know, again, bitterness is not an issue for the majority of us, right? Like we never experienced bitterness in our life. But bitterness, again, is so damaging; it is so destructive, because bitterness can also be an indication that there is a lack of trust. And [in] the presence of bitterness, there's typically disunity. In the presence of bitterness, there's usually disunity because trust has been broken.

So how do we overcome bitterness? We overcome bitterness when we realize that there is a commonality that you and I have, and that commonality is actually in Christ. All the way throughout Philippians, (you will notice as you read it; I encourage you to do it; you can do it in one fell kind of, you know, sitting; you can just read through the entire thing), count how many times Paul says agree in the Lord. How many times he says agree in the Lord? Well, there's so many things to disagree on. There's so many things to be bitter about. But, when you just include this one little thought, what are the things that we can agree in the Lord on, it actually orients and overcomes the sense of bitterness that we might have.

Here's the third category: pride. Pride, again for the Philippines is pretty massive, because they're walking around as Roman citizens. And so, anybody who's not a Roman citizen is less than and really left out. But what Paul says is that our pride is not rooted in a citizenship that we have on Earth, or because of what we have done or what we have accomplished. It's not a lack of pride. But it's rightly placing our pride in the One who is worthy of that, and who is that? It's Jesus. It's in Christ.

And here's what's really intriguing all throughout Philippians, especially Philippians Chapter 2, there's this brilliant hymn, and it talks about Christ and His Incarnation. Think about that. The pride of Christ resulted in humility: that He came down onto earth and humbled Himself in the form of a human being, being fully God still, and yet entered into earth as a suffering servant. So even that sense of pride is actually rooted in humility.

And here's the last one: superiority, a sense of superiority. And superiority is so damaging in our relationships, because it means instantly for everybody, that I have to be the best, and everybody else can't be. And if we create those senses of elevation of superiority that some are better than others, then what it does is really contradicts the gospel, which actually says, we're all on an even playing field. What is that even playing field? We're all sinners. And yet, because of the mercy of Christ, we're sinners who have been saved, and who are now saints.

Philippians 1, like in the very beginning, this is what Paul starts with Philippians 1:1, "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints." That English word saints comes from the Greek word *hagios* and it means holy ones set apart. This is what frames our identity as citizens of heaven. We are saints. We are set apart. And because we're set apart, we're set to something. What is it that we're set towards? Christlikeness.

And when we are able to overcome these, these hurdles of superiority and criticism and bitterness and pride, what we do is we actually present a brilliant, missional witness to the world that says, by the way,

when you enter into the family of God, when you enter into this new kingdom, that you're absolutely welcome to be a part of, you can leave behind all of these hurdles and all of these destructive types of relationships that cause you pain and heartache; and you can enter into a relationship that is full of hope. And I don't know about you guys, but I know that's something that I long for, like I long for relationships that are right now present with all these different hurdles. And yet there's a key to being able to jump over those hurdles, and that is the presence of the gospel.

Meredith Brock: So good Joel. I'm sitting here taking notes, thinking about a friend that I have right now that there has been some like creeping distance, you know, over time that I've lost touch with her, and I don't want to. And as you're like talking, I'm thinking, okay, what happened is one of these four barriers— did one of those sneaks in? And I think none of us want to admit, like, I wouldn't say, oh yeah, I'm like, I'm a really critical person. I'm also very bitter. And I'm very prideful, and I have an air of superiority about myself. And when it's blatant like that, nobody wants to admit to it. But when you actually dig into each one of those four things, there's a subtlety that sneaks into our relationships.

And so I'm gonna do a little confession here as a mom who tends so, because I want our listeners to be able to hear those four things, and actually think about where have I done this that has caused a drift and a shift in a relationship from unity to separation. And so maybe, maybe I'm gonna do this from the mom standpoint. And Kaley, I'm gonna have you do it from the non-mom, standpoint. Ready? Here we go.

I'm gonna give some examples. Maybe as a mom, you have another friend, and you guys went out to we don't go out to Chick-Fil-A right now because of the pandemic. But maybe you were at the park and you saw her not discipline her child, and deep inside your heart you went, I would never let my child get away with that, oh my gosh. That's critical. And that creates a divide. Maybe you sent your girlfriend a text, and she never texted back. And you went, oh my gosh, I can't believe she did that, and you just let it fester instead of talking to her about it. That's bitterness. That's that subtle hint of bitterness that creeps into your heart.

Maybe you were like, oh my goodness, I cannot believe that she is like letting her kids run around in those clothes. I mean, look at how filthy they are. Let's look at his face. She probably didn't wash his face before he got here. That's pride guys, you know, and that superiority it sneaks in without you even knowing where you might think, oh, yeah, I'm gonna move into that neighborhood, so, my kids can go to that school, you know, and you really are thinking about the best education for your kid, but you allow it to sneak in the sense of that now, I might be just a tiny bit better than those that are in this other neighborhood.

And so, I have to confess those thoughts have gone through my mind at one point or another, and it has created a distance from the people that I love. And it wasn't this big, blatant blow-up fight that happened. And then all of a sudden, we were distant forever. It was these little subtle things that snuck in. So Kaley, I'm putting you on the spot, big time. But those are some of the mom things and mom examples that maybe some of our listeners have wrestled with. What does some of this look like? It doesn't have to be you personally, but how do you see some of this play out?

Kaley Olson: Yeah, that's a great question. As you were talking, I was thinking about someone out there who is part of a team, who is working towards a common goal. This could be maybe you're a volunteer at a church, and you're part of a team who's all, all of you have different assignments to get something accomplished. Maybe at work, like I know I'm a part of a team of four different people who all oversee different people in our department, and we're trusted to accomplish the goals of the ministry. Or maybe I don't know, you're a teacher who's a part of a lot of other teachers and your goal is to, you know, create unity among your classrooms in the school together.

But there comes a time and, you know where I'm going with this, we are talking about trust, but there comes a time whenever you are in a relationship with those people, where you've been appointed to a task, right? Like I am an expert in my area so, there can be pride, there can be some superiority, that can make me critical of a decision that someone else makes, because I would have liked to have been brought into that decision. Or there could be bitterness because I got left out and that makes me mad. And I think those things hinder us from being able to function well as a team — whether it's at school, whether it's a volunteer, whether it's a church, or whether it's as a family and then ultimately, as a body of Christ.

And I think something you said, I don't know Joel if it was you or if it was you Meredith, but you said something about the word “trust,” and we have to have this common trust with one another to lay aside criticism, bitterness and pride and superiority. But I think it takes a level of self-awareness to be able to check yourself in where you are having issues with those things. But I also think when you've built enough trust up with the people who you're working with, you can be open and honest and ask them to show you where you're struggling in this process. And I love the balance of both of those things. It's being humble enough and letting go of that pride enough to ask somebody, hey, what do I need to work on these types of things?

Meredith Brock: Or, you know, I think in other examples, it's when I don't know if you guys have ever experienced this, but when all of a sudden, a friend who used to be a really good friend, or maybe a co-worker who used to be a really good co-worker, all of a sudden there's a distance. And you're not sure why. And you could just ignore it and just keep on trucking, you know, but there's likely a reason why that distance happened. And so, to have the maturity to step in and say, hey, I know like, at one time me and you, we were close and now we're not. Is it just circumstantial? Have we just drifted? Or was there something there that happened, that I said? And allow them to speak into you into your life and allow the Holy Spirit to convict where only He can. You know Joel, I think this is just such a practical teaching for our listeners today. If you could leave them with one thought, what would it be?

Joel Muddamalle: Yeah, I think the both of you just said that. You said trust multiple times and here's the challenge. I think if you and I put all of our hope and our faith and our confidence in trusting ourselves or trusting the other person to do what is right, it's going to lead to a world of heartache. It just will. Because we in and of ourselves are not honestly trustworthy people. You want to know, ask my wife. I promised her last night that I would put the salmon away. I'm serious. I promised her and, you know, I kind of did. I put it in the glass-like container.

Meredith Brock: It didn't make it into the refrigerator, did it?

Joel Muddamalle: I mean, you know, right? So, this is a funny thing. But honestly, what Paul does all the way throughout Philippians is he keeps bringing us back to Jesus. He keeps bringing us back to the central and only person that is capable of fully being trustworthy. And I want to present this idea: if I put all of my trust and humility in Christ, and Meredith, if you put all of your trust and humility in Christ, and, Kales, if you put all of your trust and humility in Christ, we can actually trust each other because we have commonly put our faith in Christ. And so, I think that's really what Paul is trying to get us to.

Meredith Brock: Wow.

Kaley Olson: So good. Joel. Thank you so much for coming on the show today. I know that you just gave everybody a practical takeaway, but we want to take that one step further and invite you guys into our next First 5 study on the book of Philippians. I said the title earlier. It's called, "How Then Can We Be Friends: Overcoming the Issues That Hinder Your Relationships." And part of the content that Joel shared today with the bitterness and the criticism and all those four statements, they're part of the study guide that our team wrote and produced in house. You guys are going to want to get your hands on that. And so, Meredith, can you tell our friends how to join this study?

Meredith Brock: Absolutely. Well, first, the first thing you're going to want to do, if you haven't already, is download the free First 5 mobile app. It's available for any of your devices. Just go to your app store, google First 5, and you'll find it right there by Proverbs 31. Download that. And then once you get in there, you'll see that the Philippians study will be live. It will be going and then you're going to want to get your hands on that study guide, just like Kaley said. And you can go to P31bookstore.com and grab it there. Order it so you can follow along the daily teachings on the app. And then you have the additional study right there in your study guide to go a little bit deeper.

Kaley Olson: Yes, yes. And we want to, we want you to invite your friends. I think that this would be a great study to do alongside a friend or anybody, a part of your community. And I also want to take a quick second and just mention the free resources we have available for download anytime on our website. You can visit our resource library by going to Proverbs31.org/read and then clicking. "Resource Library."

You can get things like "15 Prayers for Your Son or Daughter" by Lysa TerKeurst, our president. It's a great new resource and then, "Now What? A Guide to Process and Apply Biblical Messages," which would be great for teaching like this. So, like I said, we have resources like this and more all available for free to help you deepen your faith and grow your knowledge of the Word.

Meredith Brock: Well, that's it for today. Friends, thank you so much for joining us. We pray that today's episode helps you know the truth of God's Word and live out that truth because when you do, we believe it really will change everything.