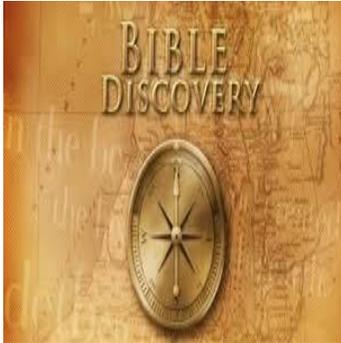


May 3, 2015

Philippians 3:7-14

Living Positive Lives for God



Some years ago, I attended a conference in St John's New Brunswick as a workshop leader where the keynote speaker introduced his topic to a room filled with trucking company owners and managers encouraging them to pursue "POT". One could hear breathing stop for a second – trucking's a heavily monitored industry with testing for the presence of drugs and alcohol, so pursuing pot wasn't what they expected to hear. The twist was the speaker wanted them to pursue "positive outlook thinking" rather than "negative outlook thinking".

It's refreshing to be around positive thinking people who seem to naturally maintain a positive attitude. But let's be honest, encountering a positive person is a rare occurrence these days. What's inside of us that naturally pulls us toward the negative side of things? It doesn't have to be a major, catastrophic event to send us spiraling into negative thinking. Something as simple as someone cutting us off in traffic or pushing ahead of us in the grocery checkout line's enough. We "try hard" to be positive, attempting to over-ride how we truly feel, to have copious levels of "pot" as that speaker suggested. Yet often we fail, allowing annoying life issues to creep up and dump all over our positive attitude. When it comes to the philosophy of positive thinking, I love a tweety Bird caption which reads, "So far today, I'm doing okay. I've not gossiped, lost my temper, been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or self-indulgent. I've neither whined, complained, cursed nor eaten any chocolate. I've charged nothing on my credit card. But, Lord, things will change as I will be getting out of bed in a minute, and I will really need your help then!" There's got to be a better way! Thank God there is. Paul teaches, *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* [Romans 12:2]

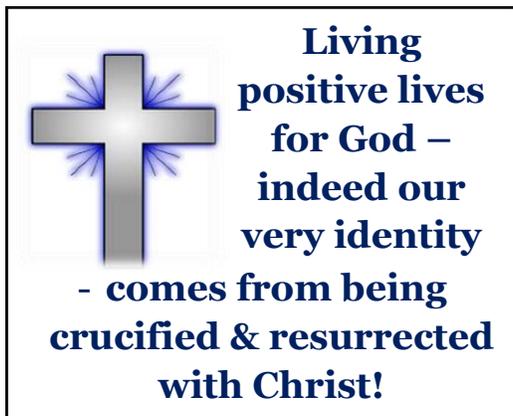


Trying hard for a positive attitude is easier said than done, right? That's because a positive attitude comes not from our circumstances but from our perspective of our circumstances! Paul certainly had

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this in mind writing the Philippians, encouraging them (and us) to place our confidence – not in what we see and touch and feel – but in our faith in Christ; in the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith! Jesus said that with faith just the size of a little mustard seed we can move mountains. King David knew what Jesus meant, so many years before when he wrote that though an army surrounded him, he wouldn't be afraid [Psalm 27:3]. This was no simple boast by David. In 1 Samuel 23 we read of how Saul had besieged David and his men, intent on killing them all. So when David said he found courage in God while being surrounded by an army, he really meant it! And when the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:11 he'd learned how to be content in every situation, he didn't state this merely for effect. He'd been stoned, imprisoned, shipwrecked, bitten by a snake to name just a few of the

things which happened to him, and yet still experienced peace in Jesus. When Jesus said in Matthew 19:26 that all things are possible with God, He knew what He was talking about; through the power of God Jesus was raised from the dead after He'd been crucified cruelly on the cross for our sins!



My friends, living positive lives for God - indeed our very identity - comes from being crucified and resurrected with Christ! We've been buried with Him through baptism into death, therefore as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too walk in newness of life. For if we've "become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin." (Romans 6:4-6) If we're to live positive lives for God, we do so having immersed our lives

in total surrender to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Someone said years ago – "Religion is just a crutch" to which I pray each of us humbly respond, "So, who isn't limping?" But the great news I want you to receive this morning is not to pick up your crutches and stumble home for another long week of regret. No! I want you to cast those crutches aside, abandon the limitation of man-centered religion & bounce with a new step to the presence of the power of Jesus Christ in your everyday circumstance and know you have the victory! Let me leave you with these first steps you should take as you begin to live positive lives for God...

1. Live positive lives for God

We must choose a permanent solution to overcoming the negative actions and words which permeate our daily existence. I suggest we accomplish this by "who" we focus on rather than the what. Listen to what Paul declares: "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord". The NIV goes so far as to replace "loss" with the term garbage - "rubbish". In other words, everything in life is worthless compared to the jewel which is ours in having Christ. We can even check off all the right boxes for what a Christian should look like, but still miss the mark. What matters is gaining Christ in your life, living in the spirit of the law, and walking by faith. Think that through carefully folks. Having Christ is enough. Having Christ is everything. Having Christ supplies all your needs. How's that for a new perspective?

2. Deal with all the Negative

If then our focus is on the "who" and the "who" is Jesus our Lord and Saviour, what do we do with all the negative that keeps creeping into our lives? Listen again to the sound advice we have from Paul this morning. "One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Our focus on Jesus means as soon as negative thoughts come into our mind, we purposefully make it a point to replace it with positively centering our thoughts on Christ. Paul explains the process at 2 Corinthians 10:5, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." At first, this may take some work, because chances are, we will probably have a lot more negative thoughts in our head than positive ones. But think of this – if you fill your cup

with a fresh cup of coffee – hot and tasty – is there any room left for the putrid, lukewarm muck left over from yesterday? No – you’ve dumped the old and given a place for the new and it has filled your cup!

As we truly to rid our hearts of negative influences which weigh us down and pull the carpet out from under our spiritual legs, we must stop letting other people’s negative attitudes influence us. First and foremost, share Christ! Give them the joy of His presence in their lives. But not all will choose Jesus. This may mean we need to stop hanging around people who do nothing but spout negative stuff; we may need to change our activities. The negative people in our life aren't going to like it when we stop participating in their negativity. Consider you’re on vacation and you look out the window of your hotel room after journeying for hours, paying big bucks, and looking forward to the beach and the palm trees and the ocean breeze – you pull open the drapes and all you see is the wall to the building next door. Yuck! Now suppose the hotel gives you a free upgrade to an ocean front view – would you want to go back to your original room? Not!

3. Make a list of all the areas in your life you want to change

Be specific. Notice how Paul states quite clearly, “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering”? Paul’s primary goal was to become like Jesus even to giving his life over to death for the sake of the gospel, so that he, Paul, would receive the joy of an eternity spent with his Saviour, Jesus Christ. What are your positive goals? What do you need to change if you’re to attain your goals? If you can't think of things to put on your list, just ask your family. I'll bet they'll help you make it a really long list!

4. Always Pray!

The greatest advice I can give you this morning is take time to pray about this. Spend time with the One who’s able to help. And when you give it to Him, leave it there! It really is that simple. The one thing robbing us of moving forward in Christ and finding peace and joy and a positive outlook is sin which separates us from God. Therefore, as we pray, let us confess our sin and seek that Jesus will direct our paths teaching us to live by the Word of God; let us cry out like David, "Have mercy on me, O God...blot out my transgressions and cleanse me from my sin..." (Psalm 51:1-2).

Change, Confusion, Trials, Attacks, Unmet Desires, Conflict, & Strained Relationships

All these and many more events in our lives can throw us off balance keeping us from living positive lives for God. Yet, read Paul’s letters and you’ll discover the greater the trial he faced, the greater his positive outlook. His life’s a living illustration of how severe affliction never stopped his living a positive life for God. James, the brother of our Lord, said in his Epistle, "*Consider it all joy ... when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance*" [James 1:2-3].

**God has His
own profound
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Remember then, God has His own profound purpose in your afflictions. To maintain a positive perspective in life we must adopt God's perspective regarding our trials. When we yield to the working of His Holy Spirit in our lives, difficulties do not overwhelm us. By holding to God’s perspective we learn handling change well is possible - chains are broken, and sins forgiven. The good thing is you don't have to do it alone. Through CHRIST and HIS grace, all things are possible.

In this world wracked with pain, violence, and heartache, a person who walks living a positive life for God is a rare commodity. Yet it's to be the distinctive of every Christian, making us magnetic to those seeking spiritual answers in an unbelieving world. Author Peter Chin wrote, "It's deeply encouraging for me to realize that the promises of Scripture aren't false claims or idle boasts, but rock-solid assurances. The power of God really is able to bring hope, courage, and new life in even the darkest days!"

What determines whether you're living a positive life for God? Your circumstances, which shift like desert sand or your perspective of your circumstances, viewed through the lens of Jesus, the rock of your salvation? If as you read this you have more questions than answers, don't you think you should reach out and talk about it? Give us a call at 1-519-317-8659 at Mt Brydges Baptist Church our send an email through this website.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave