**His Story 8 - PHILLIPPIANS - THE ART OF DISCOVERING JOYFUL CONTENTMENT**

The last time I spoke, I read the amazing story of the NZ mountain climber **Lydia Bradley** ***‘Going up is Easy’*** who was the first women to climb Everest without the aid of oxygen…and she did it alone. The book goes into the controversy surrounding her remarkable climb and her life story. But there was one golden nugget in the book which I came across unexpectedly. She was telling how many of her fellow climbers had fallen to their deaths and done so in places where you would not think a fall would take place. You would think that the most dangerous parts would be when you were furthest from your home or base hut, or when you are the most exposed, and while that is true the statistics portray something quite different. Most climbers fall when they are close to home but not focussing on the apparent danger because they feel safer – but they are not. This is also seen in road accidents here in NZ, many of which are within a few kilometres from their houses (my wife will bear witness to this). So here’s my point – is this not also true in our spiritual journeys? That we are in more danger with the familiar and the ordinary than the circumstances which stretch us to the core?

The overwhelming message of the book of Philippians is one of **joyful contentment**. But it is a joy which is not dependent upon favourable circumstances, achievement, or upon a pleasurable lifestyle, or the absence of conflict. For most of us, we measure our joy level by how well our lives are going, how problem-free or worry-free we are. For us, joy is a feeling that is connected to pleasure and stimulation of our senses. I am most joyful when I have things that provide pleasure in my life. But here in this book of the Bible is another kind of joy entirely… a different kind of joy.

This kind of joy can be found in a prison cell, after a shipwreck, when opponents malign, and even when your life is hunted down. It’s a joy that is not so much of a feeling as a sense of knowing that God is with you and gives you the strength to get through whatever you’re facing. This kind of joy is of a deeper kind that Philippians speaks about….an *attitude of gratitude* that rises above circumstances. How can someone say – in my suffering I am joyful. Or as my body slowly gets old, or is wasting away that they are still *filled with joy*?

As I read the book of Philippians this last week, I was asking the question – Paul how did you find this kind of joyful contentment? How did you manage to do this with so many disappointments? So many who opposed you and sought to undermine your life purpose?

How did you manage to run this race of life when you felt so undermined and opposed?

How were you able to be **detached** from your critics and opposers and yet remain so **attached** to the communities of faith who followed Jesus through thick and thin? How did you manage not to lose heart when your life ends in a prison cell miles from the Churches you planted and your only way of communicating with them was by letter and prayer?

And I think I found the answer in this book....there are **five things** that kept him on track so he wouldn’t lose his way. These are like boundary posts that keep us on the narrow path to life. Later in the message, I’m going to tell you about the harbour entrance to Greymouth and why so many ships have floundered instead of reaching safety.

**1. He lived with uncompromising obedience *to what God called him to do.***

Here is the first secret to living with joy in the face of trials. If you are called by God just do it…. *don’t let other people lead your life!* Recently, I was thinking about a situation in my life where a person has had a difference of opinion to me to the degree that I became aware that I was letting his opinion be the deciding factor in my life rather than what God wanted.

It came to me that I had abdicated the leadership of my own life to this person when all I needed to concern myself with was this – what is God asking me to do?

This does not mean we disregard what people are saying especially if we are in a relationship with them – but it does mean we **set our life course** having heard from God – and keep that front and centre. *For me to live is Christ* **Phil 1.2** For me to follow the course God set – It's Him I’m following and serving. For me, there is no other option! There is joy when you know that your life is centred on being obedient to God. This enables you to face the most difficult challenges that come your way. It's liberating because you have a clear pathway ahead. So do you know what your *life purpose* is? Have you spent time praying and seeking God for what it is? It does not mean you are called into a full-time ministry – it means you know what to do and the gifts of God you carry.

Let me just share a bit from my life story. In 2000 I needed to take some time out of ministry – embarked upon a career in real estate. The markets were running hot and I did well. For six years I did this. And during this time God rebuilt me from the inside out. But you know there came a time when making money was not the real me. My heart wasn’t in it. I just knew that I wasn’t doing what God built me for….and I longed for God to open up a way back. And he did. Something happens deep within you that just knows this is the right way to live life. This is the right use of your time, energy and resources.

While I am speaking on the use of resources, I want to urge all of us to review our financial commitment to giving. Are you truly giving to God faithfully, generously and regularly? **Philippians 4:19** *‘My God will supply your needs from his glorious riches’* is linked to verses that told how these believers first gave their money and wealth to God’s work. Uncompromising obedience includes our wealth and finances, our daily choices and our desire to discharge our service for God. Put this first and joyful contentment will be yours because your life will be uncluttered. Live with uncompromising obedience to Jesus…..especially to the call of God and your life purpose.

**2. He lived with a godly response *to what presented itself each day.***

Hardly a day goes by without some opportunity to respond or speak to someone – how did you conduct yourself? Were you modelled on Jesus – with humility? Did you meet those contentious situations with a desire to pour your life into others regardless of what you got out of it? The model of our leadership is to be servanthood…. Not going to resort to plausible argument, or claim confidence in myself. We don’t resort to the *chain of command* like the army! We try to lead by example of serving. Decide that whatever comes your way today that you will meet it with a godly response. Look for **opportunities** to serve others. Live with a **forgiving** attitude. These are all daily choices. Live with an **attitude** of gratitude

**3. He lived with judgemental discernment *towards those who disagreed with him.***

Now here is one that I wasn’t sure what to call it – I struggled with the word judgemental because it has such a negative connotation, but I’ve left it in because I really think it is the right word. What is this? It’s having a clear ability to weigh and discern what is happening around you and making your decisions accordingly. I don’t spend time trying to compete with others for popularity. I have a clear *understanding* of what is valuable and what is worthless. Because when you know where the value lies it enables you to reject alternatives. When you know what puts us right with God, then you don’t become caught up in other arguments. So, joy is *not just a feeling; it is a result of developing discernment* and wisdom in your thinking. To those who claim to teach truth but don’t – exercise discernment. Towards those who malign you and oppose you - exercise restraint. Towards those who lie - develop a discernment that divides. Towards those who disappoint you when you expect more from them.

**4. He lived with a focused faith *towards the future.***

The fourth is one we know about but need to be very proactive about. Forgetting the past which I cannot change I focus my faith on *where I’m going* not on where I’ve come from.

I cannot change my past, but I can change my future. These verses remind us also that it is possible to lose what we have secured or learned if we don’t hold onto it. How do we keep focused on the future? We remind ourselves where our *destination* is.

Illus: When a ship enters port it lines up with markers on the shore that are fixed, and keep firmly located on them to stay in the channel. The Greymouth harbour entrance – shipwrecks abound because the focus has shifted from the destination to looking at the shoreline and the rocks. I’m a citizen of heaven, not the earth, that’s my real home.

**5. He lives with a can-do attitude *towards his challenges.***

I’ve learned that what I can do comes my way with God’s strength. Joy comes into your life when you declare, what I am facing is too heavy for me, but I’m going to find strength from God to face it and bear it. And if God doesn’t heal me or fix my problem the way I think he should I will not stop nor give up. God’s promise to my life is that I will find deep joy and peace amid this situation. I’m not going to allow what I feel to be the determining factor in my day. I’m going to prove God’s strength today will get me through, even if what comes is surprising and different to what I planned. I am only responsible to respond to what is placed before me. Whether I have plenty or little and I feel it – I find God’s strength to lift me above what I feel. I can see that the times when things happened and I was thrust on God I learned the most.

***Let me make these five points from another perspective:***

Be discontent with shallow obedience when it suits you. Be discontent when you feel you allowed your baggage or your past issues to rule your judgement. Be discontent when you find yourself coming to conclusions about a situation or a person because the outcome suits you better. Be discontent when you find yourself thinking more about the past than the future. Be discontent when life’s challenges are just too great, and you pull back from saying or doing what you know is the right thing. None of these leads to joyful contentment.

**The Race and the Prize**

Paul finishes writing this letter to these believers and says... there is a possibility for every one of us not to finish running the race. We can run and not finish, we can run and not focus, we can run and all we do in this life amounts to nothing…. because we get side-tracked onto lesser things. Paul says – hold onto what progress you have made so you don’t lose it. Phil 3.16 *press on to secure the prize* 3.14 What **is the prize?** Is it some kind of reward for the good we have done? Does God hand out medals to those who finish 1st 2nd or 3rd….no, I don’t think so! The reward must be Jesus then? No - I believe the reward is – the ‘well done’ that you have discharged your life purpose well with what God entrusted to you when you arrive on that day in Heaven and the legacy you leave behind you from those who have been impacted by your obedience to Christ.

**PHILIPPIANS SAYS TO US.**

Live your life with joyful contentment: By **uncompromising obedience** to what God has called you to do. By **godly response** of character to people – humble servant. By **wise discernment** that judges rightly. By **focussed forward-looking faith** and by a **‘can do’ attitude of gratitude** with God’s strength.

Larry Crabb puts it this way **“The joy God offers grows in a soil of emptiness and brokenness”.**  Your emptiness becomes an opportunity for his power to live in you.

Your brokenness becomes an opportunity for you to have gratitude for his forgiveness.

Most of us are too full for God’s joy! Or trying to fill up our lives with things that will not satisfy us. And when we simply rest and trust God for his strength…we pray! And Peace comes to us. God’s peace will reign in your mind. Greek Lit – ‘**will be the umpire**’ – the deciding factor on what you do and how you live through something challenging.

And joyful contentment will be yours together with a peace the world cannot give….because you know nothing is going to happen to me that God does not know about…..has not cleared…and will not use for his glory.

***Then you can experience the kind of JOY the world knows nothing about. A joyful contentment because you are living out your life purpose for God…regardless of what is happening around you.***