



#1 Don't Put Too Much Stock in Circumstances

Philippians 1, Psalm 23, Genesis 45:4-8 & 50:20, Esther 4:14

Introduction

We all know people who bawl their eyes out with every event that goes against their dreams or go into rhapsodic trances when things do go their way.

__A teenage girl sobs because some boy is showing his attention to another girl.

__A school teacher shakes her head and sighs because the student cannot get the lesson or will not study.

__A preacher wonders if his ministry is worth continuing when the church has setbacks and doesn't grow.

Anyone who chooses to let at his/her present circumstances control being happy or sad is being foolish. That is choosing to use the wrong lens on life.

A young couple moves into a new neighborhood. The next morning while they are eating breakfast, the young woman sees her neighbor hanging the wash outside.

"That laundry is not very clean," she said. "She doesn't know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap."
Her husband looked on, but remained silent.

Every time her neighbor would hang her wash to dry, the young woman would make the same comments.

About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband: "Look, she has learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this?"

The husband said, "I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows."

So what is your window on life like?

Let's look at Paul's life to see how he speaks to faithful Christians at Philippi. These were loyal friends.

We can learn a lot from this letter about having a clear window on life.

Paul Realizes That Unpleasant Circumstances Can Bring Unimagined Benefits (*You have to look through the window and wait for the picture to become complete.*)

When Paul wrote this letter about 61AD he had been delivered to Rome and was under house arrest (in prison).

This happened because he was not getting a fair hearing after an illegal arrest in Jerusalem and a lengthy and illegal detainment there. Finally he appealed for a hearing before the Caesar, then survived what should have been a shipwreck fatal to all on the island of Malta, approaching Italy.

Philippians 1:12-14, 1:19-20

Example From the Past – Joseph (*Genesis 39-50*)

Joseph, a precocious but scorned 2nd youngest brother of 12 in a deeply divided and dysfunctional family is the victim of a plot by his older brothers.

The adult sons plot to kill the teenager but he narrowly escapes death when one of his older brothers suggests he be sold into slavery instead of killing him.

In Egypt the slave boy's brilliance allows him to rise in influence and circumstances. But then another "setback" resulting from a false accusation puts him in prison.

There, his ability to interpret dreams (the same amazing capability that enraged his brothers) leads to his introduction to the Pharaoh.

He rises to the pinnacle of Egyptian power, with the full support of the Pharaoh when he first sees his own brothers after many years. Due to famine they have come to Egypt to buy food. Although Joseph recognizes them, they do not realize this Egyptian ruler is actually their long lost brother.

He interviews them and learns his baby brother is living and so is their father, Jacob (Israel). While the brothers still do not recognize him, he manipulates things so his only full brother, Benjamin will, too, be brought to Egypt.

A second time the family comes to Egypt for more food, this time with Benjamin. But their father and an older brother, Judah, remain in Canaan.

Finally, Joseph, can not contain his emotions any longer and with such loud wailing it could be heard throughout the palace, he reveals himself to them.

But they are deeply troubled.... Would Joseph seek revenge against them? Little did they realize the deep faith in God that had developed in Joseph.

Joseph assures them the whole nasty plot was God sending him ahead to save the whole family of Israel. Genesis 45:8 is an example of a man who had a crystal-clear lens on life.

“It was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me a ‘father’ to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.”

Then the rest of the family, father Israel, brother Judah, and all the women and children came to Egypt and Joseph and his 130-yr old father were united at long last.

After another 17 years Jacob (Israel) dies and after the funeral, the brothers again are fearful that Joseph would now bring revenge upon them.

Again, Joseph expresses the same faith in God (Genesis 50:20)

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

Here is the question for us...

Can we see past the present circumstances and try to understand that God might be working out something beyond our imagination?

Let me repeat that thought with a different reference....

Paul tells the Philippians not to worry about his incarceration in Rome indicating some sort of rejection by

God... instead it has already resulted in an unplanned spread of the gospel in the very center of Roman power.
Philippians 1:12-14

The parallel with Joseph MUST have been on Paul’s mind.

Paul also realizes that he could die, and that, too, would also be God’s Providence

Philippians 1:21

A few weeks ago we preached about Mordecai, a Jewish captive in Babylon (Iraq) whose orphan niece he adopted. To help protect her Jewish identity, she was given a safer name, Esther. Her beauty and charm eventually led to Esther’s becoming the queen of Babylon. When a devious plot to kill her uncle and in fact to slaughter all her people, she was challenged to take a huge risk and try to persuade the unpredictable king to prevent the holocaust. Mordecai reminded Esther, that perhaps her circumstances had happened for just such a time. Esther 4:13b-14

“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape death. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows that you have come into the royal position for such a time as this.”

Esther said... “I will go to the king... And if I perish, I perish.”

By this point in his life Paul had survived numerous brushes with death. In his first days after becoming a Christian, friends had to let him slip through a gap in the wall of Damascus. Plots against his life were hatched in Jerusalem but his nephew learned of it and Paul was spared. He was brutally beaten several times (the kind of beating that did cause some victims to die and which seriously injured all). And on the way to Rome, the winter storm on the Mediterranean causing shipwreck on Malta should have killed all aboard the ship, but all lived.

Paul knew death was always possible for him, specifically because he was an ambassador for Christ. But it did not matter to him. He was ready for it; he did not shrink in the face of death.

Perhaps he was like any soldier, then and now, they all realize death could come any time, but they go on. And most live... because they control or guide their emotions toward DOING the right thing rather than wallowing in their fear.

But, Paul doesn't really expect to die. Not at this time. *Never forget though, only a few years later his letters definitely give the impression he expects to die soon. And history tells us he was martyred as he expected to be.*

Philippians 1:24-26 But this time Paul is hopeful...

"I know that I will remain and I will continue with you ...

Paul is not the simplistic optimist who thinks "everything is wonderful" or that when you have a desirable outcome it is the sign you are living the right way. *(A very common attitude, then AND now.)*

How silly it is to base the state of our hearts and minds on the events of the day.

Stocks are up or down. Jobs are there or not.

Somebody loves me or not. I have an illness or not.

The point is... all of us CAN decide what our lens on life is going to be. Sure, some people are born with different dispositions and personalities.

Deciding to trust God and expect that events will work out and it will be OK, that is what the bible calls wisdom and joy.

The idea is repeated many places in Scripture, using many different words.

In all cases, ALL OF US make a choice every day, repeatedly throughout every day to let fear grip us or to trust God and follow his way.

TRUST AND OBEY, there is no other way....