

Coram Deo  
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura  
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi  
Deo Volente  
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church  
By the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

# "Attitude Adjustment"

Philippians 2

Series: "Finding Joy Right Where You Are"

*February 5, 2023*

There was a tombstone that someone found that seems to state this view clearly. After the name of the person was written these words. "Died, age thirty--buried, age sixty." That is an appropriate epitaph for far too many people today.

I came across an article that I still return to every so often to think about. It was entitled "Advice to a Bored Young Man," It communicates how much one person can contribute, if only-

It began by saying that many people reading papers today are doing so with the aid of bifocals. The inventor was Benjamin Franklin, at the age of 79. At the age of 40 he discovered electricity, at age 45 he founded a University. Harland Sanders was 62 when he started Kentucky Fried Chicken Restaurant Chain. Ray Kroc created McDonalds at 52. Bernie Marcus opened the first Home Depot at 50. Charles Flint started IBM at 61, Ernestine Shepherd started working out at 56 and is the oldest bodybuilder now at 76.

Making a difference in ours or others' lives has nothing to do with how young or old we are, but really depend upon three things. --our attitudes, actions and allies. And this is what Philippians 2 is showing us.

I

Having the right **attitude** can help you have joy right where you are. The dictionary on my desk defines attitude as "a manner of acting, feeling, or thinking that shows one's disposition...opinion, mental set." That means that how we think determines how we respond to others.

A father who was frustrated and upset with his son's grades at school attempted to get his 14-year old son to study for a test to pull up his grades. So he told his son in no uncertain terms the story of Abraham Lincoln, saying: "Son, when Abraham Lincoln was your age, he had a job and he walked 14 miles in the snow to get to school and every night, he came home and studied and did his homework, reading books by the light of the fire, for the next day."

To this his son replied, "Dad, when Abraham Lincoln was your age, he was President of the United States of America."

Chuck Swindoll had this to say about attitude. "The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of Attitude on life. Attitude to me is more important: than facts, than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people

think or say or do, than appearances, than giftedness or skill or age. It will make or break a company...a church...a home.

The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one thing we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.

We convince ourselves that life will be better after we get married, have a baby, then another. Then we are frustrated that the kids aren't old enough and we'll be more content when they are. After that we're frustrated that we have teenagers to deal with. We will certainly be happy when they are out of that stage. We tell ourselves that our life will be complete when our spouse gets his or her act together, when we get a nicer car, are able to go on a nice vacation, when we retire.

The truth is, there's no better time to be happy than right now. If not now, when? Your life will always be filled with challenges. It's best to admit this to yourself and decide to be happy anyway.

What is it that you see? How do you approach life--positively or negatively?

The story of the two buckets underlines this question. One bucket was an optimist, the other was a pessimist. "There has never been a life as disappointing as mine," said the empty bucket as it approached the well. "I never come away from the well full but what I return again empty."

"There has never been such a happy life as mine," said the full bucket as it left the well. "I never come to the well empty but what I go away again full."

Our attitude tells us what we expect from life. Do you approach life disappointed at being empty, or delighted at being able to be filled? If we are to fulfill our purpose, we need to approach life with the right attitude.

On more than one occasion I have been asked, why I end each sermon with You think about that? It began over 30 years ago, when just after being ordained I stood before a congregation of people and had to preach for the first time, and I struggled with why on earth they would believe what I say, or what the scriptures say, or what the scriptures say that Jesus said, just because I said. it. The truth is you shouldn't. All ask you to do is to think about it, digest it, mull it over, and come to a decision of your own. But do come to a decision. For thoughts are things.

Sow a thought  
Reap an act  
Sow and act  
Reap a habit  
Sow a habit  
Reap a Character  
Sow a Character reap a destiny.

It all begins with the thoughts we think about, and so Paul said, have this mind about you that was in Christ Jesus. Don't allow envy or strive and bitterness in. Why did he say that, because thoughts produce something in our life for good or ill?

## II

Having the right attitude, and secondly the right **actions** can help you find joy right where you are. Turn with me to verse 12-18.

The idea of working out one's salvation for some is confusing. We are not saved by ourselves, but by Christ. So what does he mean? He means living it out. Acting on what has been accomplished for us. The word work out was the same Greek term popularly used for "working a mine" or "working a field." In each case there were benefits that followed. The mine would yield valuable elements, the field crops. It would be to bring the salvation to fulfillment.

Like a musician who takes a piece of music, sits down and begins to work out what the strange combination of cords and notes mean to the ear. Had he or she simply looked at the piece and never played it, it would still be music, but left unplayed. Its purpose would be unfulfilled. It's beauty and harmony never experienced.

Or another way of looking at it would be if one became ill and went to a doctor. The doctor diagnoses the ailment and prescribes the proper treatment. The prescription is handed to us and we take it to the pharmacist who fills it out. So far, everything has been done for us--diagnosis, prescription, medication. It now becomes our responsibility to follow the doctor's orders exactly as stated. By working out this process we enjoy the benefits of the recovery.

Spiritually, our goal in working out God's prescription is to experience His purpose and pleasure for us. And we do this recognizing that we don't do it alone, for He is at work with in us--to present us blameless, innocent, above reproach as lights in the darkness.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." Do you remember that from Ephesians? Do you remember what workmanship means in the Greek? It is poiema from which we get our word poetry.

For we are His poetry created in Christ Jesus. Your life and mine is to be a work of art--a poem--a masterpiece in progress.

A poem is not just meant to be read, but received. A poem is meant to elevate the spirit, to move the soul, to touch the speaker. If it doesn't it isn't worth much.

We all know poems like that. Thirty days has September, April, June and November...is one. But Spenders is not.

I think continually of those who were truly great.  
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history  
Through corridors of light  
Whose lovely ambition was that their lips, still touched with fire,  
Should tell of the Spirit clothed from head to foot in song.  
Who never allowed gradually the traffic to smother  
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit,  
And who is their lives fought for life  
And left the vivid air signed with their honor.

A poem moves us, changes us, touches us. Each one of us is poetry in progress. As you read your life's work, is it a great work--one that elevates you and others by its beauty and harmony--will it bring light to the darkness of those around you. If not, work on it. Don't let the darkness over take it.

I had the privilege of playing chess against Garry Kasparov and later speaking with him privately on June 19, 2007. Kasparov is the Grand Chess Master – the youngest world chess champion ever, when he won the title in 1985 and held it for fifteen years. After retiring from the chess world in 2005, Kasparov turned to politics and created the United Civil Front. This is a social movement whose main purpose is to “work to preserve electoral democracy in Russia. His dream is to “restore democracy” to Russia.

He believes that if the Russian president Vladimir Putin is toppled from leadership that democracy would return. “It is not a democracy today,” he told me, “it is dictatorship which is held together by former KGB agents who had worked with Putin during the Cold War and Communist era.”

Garry Kasparov has taken his chess game to the streets as a high-profile political dissident. He is challenging Vladimir Putin in this political game at a time when Russia is cracking down on dissent. He told me that, “Whenever people attempt to organize an event for Kasparov to speak; the event is disrupted by the local police and the people are arrested before he gets a chance to speak.” This has not stopped him. He uses every form of communication, including the internet and “youtube.com”, to get his message out.

This has become a dangerous game. Having begun this political chess match he told me, “I believe my country is in trouble and is going down the wrong path.” He has conquered in the past because he knew the rules and won because of that. Now, the problem is, as he said to me, “In any game, there is always a chance of winning if you know the rules. But in Russian politics, there are no rules.” I told him that day we met, that he reminded me of what Abraham Lincoln said. I told him this quote because I wanted to encourage him. Lincoln said, “I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am *not* bound to succeed, but I am bound to live by the light that I have. I must stand with anybody that stands right, and stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong. Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any one thing.”

He responded by saying, “If we make it through the next four months we might just have a chance to succeed.” I realized only after that, he was saying, if he makes it through the next four months *alive* he might have a chance to succeed. We know he lived through it, but he was right about the wrong path. We see it being played out in Ukraine.

For as Isaac Asimov said, “Unlike in chess, life continues after checkmate.” So, work it out. You think about that.