

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church

By the Rev. Dr. John S. Niles MSM

On February 26, 2023

"I Can Do It..."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfS9GMz0BfI>

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-13

Unomnuno once said, "May God, deny you peace that he might grant you glory." People long for relief from stress. Norman Vincent Peale tells the story about a man who longed for freedom from stress. He complained so much to Peale that Peale took him for a walk and then said, "You want ultimate relief from stress. There it is." And he pointed to a grave yard

Paul knew stress, distress and difficulty. He was painfully aware of the problems of life. He wasn't living a problem free life. He wasn't living without pain. Rather, he had been living with a constant nagging physical problem. He also had been living in prison, experiencing constant persecution that exacerbated the problem. Yet, as we discovered last week, he found spiritual profit, in the pressures and the pain; and showed us how God works out His purpose.

Today, I wish to show how Paul was able to pass through this in-between time. Paul sets out a progressive set of steps – which we can all use – to successfully persevere in times of problems.

I

The first principle that Paul used to find joy right where he was, was to focus on being **positive**. He said, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again, I say rejoice." Paul was reminding us to recognize that God, was in control. He was prodding us to have a positive attitude. But often we don't; do we? Often, we promote a negative attitude rather than a positive one.

Some people today respond to life by thinking that the whole world stinks. Perhaps, you have known people like that. I know I have.

Once a cranky man lay down to have a nap. To have a little fun, his grandson put some Limburger cheese on his moustache under his nose. The man awoke with a snort, charged out of the bedroom and shouted, "This room stinks!" On through the house he went shouting louder, "this whole house stinks." He charged onto the porch and shouted as loud as he could, "the whole world stinks!"

The truth was that he stunk. The problem was under his own nose.

The same is true for some of us as well. When we begin to feel that things stink, we may need to change the way we think. We may be the one who needs an attitude adjustment.

A person who has a positive attitude can be battered, but not broken. A person who has a positive attitude, is one who is a believer. Believers are achievers. As one person said,

"Whatever the mind can conceive and I dare to believe, with God's help, I can achieve."

The person with a positive attitude is a believer in themselves, and their ideas, but the person with the best positive attitude is a person who believes in God. This is because they

believe that He is in control; therefore, nothing that happens will ultimately stop God from fulfilling His will in them. As a result, they view life from a positive perspective.

“Life” someone said, “is 10% what happens to you, and 90% how you react to what happens to you.” So your attitude determines your emotional altitude.

Dr. Samuel Shoemaker tells the inspiring story of an elderly woman whom a tire that flew off a passing truck knocked down. The accident left her with a broken hip and confined her to a small room for the rest of her life. There is always the chance that one will grow bitter, or better when faced with circumstances like that. However, this woman saw all of life as a gift and sought to live it that way. Dr. Shoemaker stood by her in the hospital, she looked up from her bed of pain, and with a wonderful smile said, “Well, I wonder what god has for me to do here.”

We can either eliminate the positive or activate the negative; or we can eliminate the negative and accentuate the positive. It is up to you.

Lou Gehrig was one of the best baseball players of all time. Sadly, he got struck with a deadly disease that would kill him quickly. Before he retired from baseball and a few months before he died he gave a speech that became one of the most well known speeches ever. In that speech his famous line was, “I consider myself to be the luckiest man alive.”

We look and wonder how he could consider himself lucky or blessed. The reason why was because he stopped to count the blessings. Some people cannot see the good for their focus is always on the bad things.

II

The first principle that Paul used to find joy right where he was, was to focus on being positive and secondly by being **persistent**.

Paul never gave up. He was persistent. And yet, most people are passive. They give up too soon or never even get going. Napoleon Hill said, “Effort only fully releases its reward after a person refuses to quit.”

Forbes has said, “History has demonstrated that the most notable winners usually encountered heartbreaking obstacles before they triumphed. They won because they refused to become discouraged by their defeats.”

St. Paul was continually defeated but never deflated. He never gave up. Consider this. Malcolm Forbes, the late editor in chief of Forbes magazine, one of the most successful business publications in the world, failed to make the staff of the school newspaper when he was an undergraduate at Princeton University.

In 1962, four nervous young musicians played their first audition for the executives of the Decca Recording Company. They were not impressed and were turned down because they played badly and the sound was odd. Do you know who the four were? The Beatles.

Buddy Holly was fired by the same record company as “the biggest no-talent they ever worked with.”

Elvis Presley was fired after one performance by the Manager of the Grand Ole Opray and told “You ain’t going nowhere...son you ought to go back to drivin’ a truck.”

Thomas Edison, the greatest inventor having invented 1,300 inventions was called “too slow and hard to handle in school.”

John Milton became blind at 44 and later wrote Paradise Lost.

Terry Fox vowed to run on one leg after loosing his leg to cancer and raised 1 million before he died. And his foundation has since raise over 200 million for cancer research.

Roosevelt as paralyzed by polio at the age of 39 but still went on to become the President of the United States.

III

The principles that Paul used to find joy right where he was, was to focus on being positive, persistent and thirdly, by being **prayerful**. Paul said, *“Be anxious about nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...”*

What Paul is saying that we need to rely on God. We need to let go and let God. Paul is prodding us to bring our needs and concerns to God, especially in the painful times.

When it seems the hardest to pray, we need to pray the hardest. To be anxious is really to lack faith. And the way we lift our faith, is by laying ourselves before the Lord. For prayer really is the place where the burdens of life are lifted off our shoulders and placed on the Lord's. It has been said, “We lie to God in prayer if don't relay on God after prayer.

Again, I'm reminded of that little boy who brought a toy to his father. He lays it in his lap, and asks him to fix it. But before the father can, the child has his hands in the way, trying to show his father the way to fix it. After a few minutes the child takes the toy back angrily. Then he says, “You couldn't fix it anyway.”

Often we respond this way in life. If God isn't doing it the way we want, when we want, and how we want, we become anxious and angry. We don't understand that god's delays are not necessarily God's denials.

III

The principles that Paul used to find joy right where he was, was to focus on being positive, persistent, prayerful and finally, being **peaceful**. *“Be anxious for nothing...”*

Of course this is than the reasons we must be prayerful before we can be peaceful. *For there is no way we can know the peace of God, without knowing the God of peace.*

During WWII a young man came to one of the many drop-in centres that churches had to give some fellowship to the men who have returned or were going away to war. On one of the evenings when there was a gathering, a young man wandered into the drop in. He kept much to himself. The people gathered around to sing some of the songs of the day. As they ran out of the popular tunes, they began to sing some of the well known hymns and songs to remind the people of the power of God, and the presence of god in pain.

Long after everyone left the young man and the minister still sat and sang. The man sat down and said, “When I came here this evening, I thought I had nothing left. You see, I was married earlier this week. Just a small ceremony; my fiancé and me, her parents and mine. After we went to my parent's place for supper, we needed some things from the store. So I ran to the corner store. I heard the sound of the bomb, and than the explosion. When I got back to the house, it wasn't there. Everyone I knew and loved were gone. I had nothing left to live for. Everyone was gone; everyone, everyone, but God. You see, tonight, I have realized that god is still here. He has been my reason, and will be the reason to live. I know that now. And I know because of Him, I will be able to go on.” And you can too. You think about that. Amen.