

No.2 'Pursuing Christ no matter what'

Joy was our focus in last week's study, and it continues, but this week within a different context, that of 'keeping going when the going gets tough.' Remember that the author of this beautiful letter has been through a myriad of disasters, pain and suffering and is writing from prison under real threat of execution. Let's remind ourselves of what Paul had written at the beginning of this letter (read 1: 3-6). Now **Read Philippians 1: 12 – 26**



These two paragraphs are surely some of the most selfless and humble, yet driven and purposeful to be written; the writing of a true disciple of Jesus Christ, a timeless inspiration and challenge to us all who follow. *Paul sees his imprisonment as an opportunity, not only for himself but also for fellow Christians. Can you recall broadly similar circumstances in your life, outside church or within? What was the outcome? For you and/or witnessing for the Gospel?*

Paul will not allow those who are apparently working against him to impact his joy or deflect his Gospel spreading purpose. He even finds positive benefit from what they are preaching. *Can you see opportunity to turn what might be said against you and your faith into a positive? Or, more widely, perhaps a news item or tragedy affecting someone you know? How could your fellow group members, or the church, practically help with this?*

In verse 20 we see even the great apostle Paul being 'tempted' by concern over a lack of faith to deliver what he has been called to do; a situation familiar to us all, I think. I hear Paul hesitate at the end of the verse, then remind himself of the confidence he has in his own salvation (as we should be), then proceeds in the following verses to encourage the Philippian readers with re-devoting himself to progressing their faith, his God-given mission. *We share the same mission. Reflect on Paul's reasoning. Do you, can you, share his reasoning?*

The reading chosen to supplement this is – **Read Luke 9: 18-26** – where Jesus describes the challenge and cost of 'following him.' So important is this message that it appears in all four Gospels, actually twice in Matthew and Luke, and worded slightly differently in John (12: 25). Deny yourself, put Christ before and above all other priorities. There will be costs (take up your cross), for some, even life itself, but joy will be yours in this life, and onward into eternity with Jesus. *"Who do the crowds say I am?" "Who do you say I [Jesus] am?"* Then a caution; interestingly, perhaps this was in Paul's mind when he used the word 'ashamed', Jesus connects an ashamed response from us to a similar response from him. That is surely the reason our loving God ensured the message was made prominent within the holy scriptures, so we wouldn't miss it. *The message of the Gospel is literally the most important information you can give anyone. We need to share it – for the benefit of others first, but also for us, second.*

Prayer Lord, I am aware I do not have all this put together yet, but I am on my way, reaching out for you, who has wondrously reached out for me. Thank you, Lord.