The Letter of Joy

Philippians Chapter 3

Paul’s letter to the Philippians is regarded as a letter of thanksgiving and encouragement.

Monday:

“To write the same things to you is not irksome to me, and is safe for you.” St Paul starts out by reminding the Philippians to “rejoice.” And he tells them it’s no trouble to him to remind them. Maybe I’m showing my slothful side here, but I get bogged down in the daily reminders…”pick up after yourselves, use kind words, do your chores…” And for myself, *to myself*, in an effort to capture, maintain or create joy, “smile, speak kindly, be patient, choose joy, drink enough water, don’t watch the news or follow any internet rabbit trails…” I heard someone say the other day, “Practice makes progress.” That’s a much easier standard than “Practice makes perfect.”

Tuesday:

In Philippians 3:3 St Paul reminds us who we are and reminds us that we put no confidence in our flesh. Some translations read, “We do not put trust in ourselves or anything we can do…We put no confidence in human effort. Instead, we boast about what Christ Jesus has done for us.” Again, this sense of joy coming only when we stop focusing on ourselves and instead looking outward towards others. Ask yourself today, **specifically,** “What is one area I can trust in and boast of Christ’s work, not my own today?” Finances? Health? Marriage?

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Wednesday:

I love the mention in verse 13 of …”forgetting what lies behind and straining or stretching to what lies ahead...” One version says, “I don’t look back but lengthen my stride…” or another, “…but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead…” About 18 years ago I went through a tremendous spiritual growth spurt. I saw glimpses of myself as I really was…OUCH! It was an overwhelming feeling and I spent a lot of time discouraged about myself—past, present and future. One day, God revealed to me that if I searched the scriptures, I would not find St Peter reintroducing himself all the time, or reminding others constantly, about what a bad friend he had been to our Lord. That revelation gave me the freedom to forgive myself and to accept God’s mercy and forgiveness. **Forgiving ourselves and accepting God’s amazing grace; that’s a recipe for a joy filled life.**

Thursday:

Philippians 3:14—“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” “Paul is encouraging his reader to summon their energy and charge ahead after holiness.” (Ignatius Catholic Study Bible) What are we charging ahead after? Is the race bringing us joy? Will the prize we are striving to achieve? Really ask yourself these questions and be downright honest. **If what you are pursuing is not bringing you some sense of joy right now or will not increase your joy in the long run, stop it!** Make a drastic change in plans immediately. Watching the television brings me no joy in the present or future…so I do not watch television. Eating one more sweet treat does not bring me eventual joy, it actually makes me feel worse mentally and physically later…so I try to resist giving into the moment of wanting something that does not or will not bring me joy. How about shopping? Staying up too late? Being right?

Friday:

The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible explains verses 18-19 in this way, “Paul attacks unidentified opponents. Whoever they are, they are slaves of gluttony, shamelessness, and worldly ways of thinking. Paul weeps because their indulgence in earthly pleasures is holding them back from heaven and hastening their doom.” Let me point out 4 words that really struck a chord with me…**”worldly ways of thinking.”** The battle for joy, the quest for joy, the attainment of joy…begins and ends in our minds, in our habits of thinking. That’s why I find the book, *The 4:8 Principle* so helpful. From the book, “I’ve observed that all lasting change is preceded by changed thinking…The place to begin, then is with your thought life, with a revival of your mind.” I can attest to this first hand. You know the saying, “There but for the grace of God…” In my case it’s also, “There but for the gift of the Word of God and The 4:8 Principle…” My thoughts were hastening my doom…literally, spiritually, physically, emotionally, and mentally. If we want to seek joy and live a joy filled life, we have to purpose to align our minds with that intention..