

CHANGING OUR PERSPECTIVE: The Experiences in Life That Remind Us What is Most Important

Introduction:

You know, if we think carefully, most people who have been around a while and have been taught certain things know what the more important things in life are. But we don't always live fully according to what we know those priorities to be. Sometimes it takes an event to help us change our lives and get us to refocus and live for the things that are more important in life.

For example, when people have health scares and nearly lose their lives, they find that the event gives them new perspective, and they often make changes to their lifestyle. Here's a testimony about a 36-year-old man who got shot. He said, "***As I stared at my toes while lying in a hospital bed with bullets in my chest, I came to the realization that we never truly get a chance to stop and reflect for a sustained period of time. I'm grateful for the moment of clarity that horrific incident gave me***".

Now, not every experience needs to be scary to help us get perspective. It can be as simple as starting to shave. When we become teenagers, guys get facial hair and girls get leg hair (of course guys get leg hair too). When guys get leg hair it's a sign on manliness. Unfortunately for girls ... it's also a sign of manliness, lol. Did you ever see how weird long thick black curly leg hair looks on a girl? No offence meant, ladies. Just joking here.

How about when you finished school and entered the 'real world'. Didn't that experience give you perspective? Didn't you think at least past your studies and 3 years into your job, 'Why can't there have been 14 years of school'. I miss it. I miss my friends. Life was simpler and easier then.

Another experience that changes our perspective is getting married. Moving way past low-level-commitment relationships to a life-long commitment changes your perspective on life. They say love is blind, but marriage is a real eye-opener. Becoming a parent is another experience that helps people look at life completely differently.

What about reaching 30 or 40 or 50 years of age? Every one of those birthdays helps you realise how quickly time passes. I tell you what is a real eye opener. It's when you are in your early 40's and think you look more like early 20's and a teenager greets you and says, "Hello Oom".

We're all going through an experience right now with the lockdown. It's a real "experience". Finding ways to occupy our time that doesn't involve a screen is a challenge to some people. Finding ways to keep children busy. Having movement restricted. Not being able to meet with real people. That's an experience. Preaching to a cell phone. That's an experience. But you know, this lockdown is also a good time to stop and think about what are the more important things in life. It's a good time to refresh our perspective on where we're at in life, especially in our walk with Christ.

I think everyone who has handed their lives over to Jesus will be able to say that a **major** perspective-changing experience is an encounter with Christ. That happened to me personally when I saw religion not as going to church or giving up all my freedom and following a strict list of rules, but as **a relationship with Jesus**. Being confronted with the reality of my death and that I was sentenced to hell was a wake up call. It changed my perspective.

In Philippians 3:4-11 Paul shares his own personal experience of turning to God. It was one that changed him forever. As he saw Jesus in a new light, it changed his perspective and changed his life forever. Well he actually tells us about the **effect** of that experience here. For his *initial encounter* with God, please read Acts 9.

Read Philippians 3:4-11

PAUL'S NEW PERSPECTIVE SHOWED HIM THAT RELIGION DOESN'T WORK

- *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law” – Philippians 3:7-9*

Paul says, I tried religion and it doesn't work. You can only relate to God through Jesus Christ. You see, if there was an Olympic event called “the most religious person among the nations”, Paul would qualify to compete. He might even have won the gold medal. He's like the Cristiano Ronaldo of doing good works. From birth first by his parents' hands at the tender age of just 8 days old, and then of his own free will, he was about as religious as anyone could get.

1. Philippians 3:5
 - - circumcised on the eighth day,
 - - of the people of Israel,
 - - of the tribe of Benjamin,
 - - a Hebrew of Hebrews;
 - - in regard to the law, a Pharisee;
2. Philippians 3:6
 - - as for zeal, persecuting the church;
 - - as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

No amount of religious self-effort brought Paul closer to God. It never gave him a sense of peace that his sins were forgiven and doing all that stuff on the outside of himself, never changed him on the inside. He was still full of hatred. In fact, in the name of religion, he went around persecuting innocent people.

When he encountered Jesus, **that** encounter changed his perspective.

PAUL'S NEW PERSPECTIVE CAUSED HIM TO RETHINK HIS PAST LIFE-FOCUSES – HE CONSIDERED HIS OLD ACCOMPLISHMENTS APART FROM CHRIST TO BE “RUBBISH”

- *Php 3:7 But whatever was to my profit **I now consider** loss for the sake of Christ. Php 3:8 What is more, **I consider** everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. **I consider** them rubbish,*

Many people have said similar things. They were living for all the wrong things. They tried to change their lives using all the wrong ways that don't work. When they surrendered their lives to God, everything changed. They can see clearly. Their lives are in order. They have proper values. There is peace and they have been changed from within. They can think straight! And they have finally found the key to life, and that is to walk with God through Christ.

PAUL'S NEW PERSPECTIVE MOTIVATED HIM TO DO ALL THAT HE COULD TO 'GAIN' CHRIST:

- *Php 3:8 ... **that I may gain Christ.***

The most important possession we have in life is Jesus. It's not money, or possessions, or being liked by everyone; being popular at school and liked by everyone; it's not finding the love of your life or a couple of university degrees or a good job. Those things are not wrong, but they cannot compare to having Christ in our lives – ‘gaining Christ’. We need to ‘gain’ Jesus and **get him in the center** and make sure we know how to **keep him in the center** before we start out running after all the things people usually run after.

AFTER HE ‘GAINED CHRIST’, PAUL’S NEW PERSPECTIVE MOTIVATED HIM TO GO DEEPER IN HIS WALK WITH JESUS

Having gained Christ, we wanted to know Christ more deeply. He mentions this whole pursuit as pursuing 3 things:

- ***“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” – Philippians 3:10-11***
- 1. **“I want to know Christ”**: Plain and simple. I want to know my God. I want to have a relationship with Him. I don’t want to be religious. I want to get to know my Saviour. I want to discover how to make him my Lord. I want to imitate him. There is no greater accomplishment than to say, “I know Christ”. You can ask me about Him and I can tell you because I have a real intimate knowledge of God. When we say that, we’re not bragging. We have made it our life’s ambition.
- 2. **“and [I want to know] the power of His resurrection”**: Many people may say to themselves, If I’m a child of God, why do I feel so weak? Why am I so easily discouraged? Why so easily tempted? What is this power that can raise the dead to life that I read about in the Bible?” No-one else claims to be able to give us such power. Only the Bibles says we can have this tremendous power. Even when things have died, they can come back to life – they can be resurrected. What is this power that can break a person’s slavery - even their addiction to sin? What is this power that can change a person? An angry person fueled by rage can become at peace with themselves and at peace with the world. A person abused and molested isn’t broken, but restored. That’s the power of Christ’s resurrection that flows to all who truly know Christ. We know what He can do. We may say, “I need this power in my life.”
- 3. **“and [I want to know the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings”**: I don’t know if you’ve ever experienced this, but when we go through challenges with other people, it actually draws us closer to them. For example, people who have been through a war together develop strong bonds. They form a brotherhood – a band of brothers. Maybe women who do a women’s ultra-marathon find a sense of camaraderie. A similar thing happens to us when we suffer for being a Christian. When we go through similar things to what Jesus went through, there is a sense of brotherhood if you like, a sense of camaraderie built up between us and Christ. Many Christians in the early church experienced this:
 - *Remember the past, when you first learned the truth. You endured a lot of hardship and pain. At times you were publicly insulted and mistreated. At times you associated with people who were treated this way. You suffered with prisoners. You were cheerful even though your possessions were stolen, since you know that you have a better and more permanent possession” – Hebrews 10:32-34*

This verse reveals a secret: Facing suffering for our faith draws us closer to Jesus. Instead of separating us from Him, it draws us closer to Him. That’s why Paul says I want to know the “**fellowship of sharing in his sufferings**”. It may seem strange to us, but suffering **for** the sake of Christ, draws us closer **to** Jesus.

MESSAGE CONCLUSION:

A lot of people are worried about so many things that actually are not as important as we think they are. Paul reminds us to value the one thing that matters most, and than no change in our lives and no world-wide crises can change – that is to gain Christ and then once you have him in your life, do all you can to know him better. It’s important that we remember this during this lockdown so that we don’t lose our focus on what the most important things in our life are.

Let me end by telling the true story of someone whose encounter with Christ also changed her whole outlook on life. Francis Jane Crosby was born in 1820. When she was six weeks old, she caught a

cold, but their town doctor was unavailable, so they sought the advice from a nearby country doctor who by mistake prescribed a hot mustard ointment mixture for her inflamed eyes. When she started crying, the doctor said something to the effect that it means the mixture was working and that her parents should leave it on for the recommended time. Tragically this resulted in blinding her completely. When it became known throughout the small town, the man left and no one ever heard from him again.

Concerning this tragedy, 'Fanny' Crosby later wrote, "In more than eighty-five years, I have not for a moment felt a spark of resentment against him, for I have always believed from my youth up that the good Lord, in His infinite mercy, by this means consecrated me to the work that I am still permitted to do."

She passed away at the age of 95. But before she passed away, she wrote poetry for presidents of the USA. She became a prolific writer and was used by God to write over 9000 hymns. You may know some of them, "**Blessed Assurance**," "**All the Way My Savior Leads Me**," "**To God Be the Glory**,".

Then there's this one which ties up with today's message. I'll mention it in a moment, but this is how it came about. She was talking to one of her neighbours, who complained bitterly of his poverty. "If I had wealth I would be able to do just what I wish to do; and I would be able to make an appearance in the world" he said. Fanny replied, "Well, take the world, but give me Jesus". She was inspired by her own words, and later wrote this hymn we're about to sing, "**Take the world but give me Jesus**". Let's sing this together, shall we?