

As You Think, So You Are

Message for Sunday, August 4, 2019
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Philippians 4:6-13

Welcome to worship

I had such a fantastic week! The highlight of it was with several of the people I visited this week.

Typically, my job involves visiting with people to listen for what's happening in their lives, and encourage them in their walk with God. But in these visits, I was the one who received inspiration.

I'm not going to mention names; I don't have permission from people to do that. But I'll share some of our conversations.

With one person, I asked how I could pray for him. He replied, "I don't want to ask God for anything. I just want to say 'Thank-you' for all the blessings he's poured into my life."

Another person said something similar: "I have everything I need."

Please understand, these are not wealthy people in the peak of health. They are dealing with serious issues in their lives, and yet they have this attitude of gratitude and contentment.

One person who is in a nursing home talked about how wonderful the staff are, how much she enjoyed the food. She's such a positive person; she's always on the lookout for good things. Someone else and with a negative attitude, who's on the lookout for bad things, would be sure to find plenty to complain about. As Jesus said, "Seek and you will find."

We talked about the care she receives. I said some people do the bare minimum of the job, just what is required of them. They're just putting in time. Others put their whole heart into their work and give the extra touch. When you're on the receiving end of that care, you immediately can tell the difference between the two. This is true for any kind of work, whether it's health care worker, a plumber, a janitor, or a parent.

Putting all this together, the theme for this worship service is: "As you seek, so you will find. As you think, so you are." In other words, our attitude

towards daily life will determine what kind of life we have.

Message, part 1

I took a piece of wax on a fork, a piece wood on a fork, a piece of bread on a fork, some water in a spoon, put them over a candle flame and see how they react.

The same thing happens to each one—they get hot in the flame—yet each one responds differently. The wax melts, the wood burns, the bread turns into toast, and the water boils.

People are like that. Different people can go through the same situation, and react very differently. Let's say something hard happens in their life – say they are in accidents and lose both legs. That would be pretty awful, wouldn't it?

But then see what happens to them. One person may become bitter and miserable, and goes through the rest of life feeling sorry for him or herself. Another person may be thankful for so many good things he or she still has in life, learns to walk with artificial limbs, and has a wonderful life.

Philippians 4:11-13, New International Version:

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Message, part 2

[As people entered the building today, they were given the opportunity to put their names in a draw to be part of the game show "Wheel of Decision." Just like a TV studio, there were signs telling people when to applaud.]

Welcome to the Wheel of Decision, the game show where people face situations in life and find ways to deal with them! We've got lots of action for today's show and it's going to be exciting. Today's winners are going to leave with some really great prizes! [Applause.]

Today's first contestant is... *pull name out of the bucket and announce name.* Come on down! [Wild applause.]

Contestant 1, come on over to the Wheel of Decision, and I'll explain how the game works. I'm going to describe a situation, and you imagine that this is happening in your life right now. Then you spin the wheel to find out how you respond to that situation. On the wheel are a variety of responses, such as Worry, Pray, Eat, Blame someone, Ignore it, Panic, Get drunk, Hire a lawyer, Take revenge, Go shopping, and more.

Ready? OK, here we go! [*Applause*]

Here's the situation: Life is going smoothly for you. In fact, when you saw your doctor last week, she said you were the healthiest person of your age she's ever seen. Fifteen years ago you invested \$10,000 in a small new company called "Amazon." Your investment is now worth 100 times what you started with; you're a millionaire. You have enough money to retire and do whatever you'd like to do.

So, how do you respond to your situation? Let's spin the wheel to find out what your decision is.

Spin the wheel, and as it slows down but before it stops, grab it. Wait a moment! This isn't "Wheel of Fortune," where your future is determined by luck, and you have no say over what happens. This is "Wheel of Decision." You get to choose how you respond to your situation.

So instead of dozens of choices on the wheel, let's make it simpler: here are three chairs:

- Chair # 1: Anger. This is where you might say, "It's not fair!"
- Chair # 2: Trust. This is where you might say, "No matter what happens, Lord, I put my faith in you."
- Chair # 3: Doubt. This is where you might say, "Why is this happening? I don't understand."

Well, Contestant, which chair do you choose to sit in? *Contestant picks a chair and sits in it.*

Now that's very interesting. Would you please tell us why you chose that particular chair? *Let contestant speak.*

Now let's bring up Contestant # 2. *Pull name out of the bucket and announce name. Come on down! [Excited applause from contestants and audience.]*

You've seen how the game works. Are you ready to hear your situation? *Yes.*

OK, here's the situation: Life *was* going smoothly for you. When you saw your doctor last week, she said you used to be one of the healthiest people she knew. But the blood sample you gave shows that you have antiplastic cardioscolitis. It's an extremely rare condition where the heart loses its flexibility and it stiffens up. It's like arthritis of the heart. Every week the heart can pump less and less blood, and you become weaker and weaker. A month from now you'll be in a wheelchair. A week after that, it will take all your energy and concentration just to take each breath. Then yesterday, your home burned down. Sitting on the kitchen table was a reminder letter from your insurance company, a second reminder that your home insurance premium was overdue. You had been meaning to send the cheque, but never got around to it. You'll be gone soon, and your family will be left with nothing.

Remember the three chairs are:

- Chair # 1: "Anger: It's not fair!"
- Chair # 2: "Trust: no matter what happens, Lord, I put my faith in you."
- Chair # 3: "Doubt: Why did this happen to me? I don't understand."

But Contestant # 1 is already in Chair # *n*. So which chair will you take?

[*Note: I never said you can't take the same chair as # 1. I implied it, but I didn't say it! In this game, more than one person can sit in the same chair.*]

Now that's very interesting. Would you please tell us why you chose that particular chair? *Let contestant speak.*

Buzzer sounds. Uh oh, there's our time alarm. We're just about out of time for today's show. Let's see what prizes you've won.

Lift up the cushions on the chairs to read what's underneath.

If you sat on Chair # 1, Anger, then your prize is self-pity. You will go through life miserable and feeling sorry for yourself. You will blame other people or God for all your problems, and never learn to take responsibility for how you respond to situations.

That doesn't sound very good. But wait: here's a Bible passage with a different way of looking at problems.

Philippians 4:11-13, New International Version:

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

If you sat on Chair # 2, Trust, then your prize is hope. Nothing will ever happen to you which can defeat you. That isn't because you are invincible, because you aren't; you're only human. It is because the One inside you is greater than any situation you'll ever face.

Here's a Bible verse which tells about our source of hope.

Philippians 4:6-7, New Living Translation:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

If you sat on Chair # 3, Doubt ("Why did this happen to me?"), then your prize is despair. You will spend your life searching for answers to questions which only God can answer. Where there is no faith, there is no hope.

Again, that's not very positive. The Bible shows us a better way: instead of dwelling on the negative, focus on the positive.

Philippians 4:8-9, New Living Translation:

Fix your thoughts on what is true and honourable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.

Thank-you for being part of today's show of Wheel of Decision. You get to keep those prizes.

[Contestants return to seats.]

All of these Bible passages have a common theme: choose your attitude. You cannot do anything about what has happened to you. Many things happen over which we have no control. Even if you could have done something differently, it's too late now to go back and change things.

The only thing you can change now is your attitude. You can choose the attitude of anger, doubt, bitterness, fear, hatred, self-centredness, pride, jealousy and so on. Whatever you choose, that is what will rule your life.

Or you can choose God's way of trust, faith, love, peace, forgiveness, obedience. Again, if you choose God's way, then it is God who will rule your life.

It's up to you. It's not the Wheel of Fortune; it's the Wheel of Decision.

One more thing: don't wait until you're in a crisis to choose which way you will follow. When you're all stressed out, that is not the time to make choices which will affect the rest of your life. Choose now who or what will govern your life.

Next Steps:

- Pray: Ask for wisdom as you make one of the most important decisions of your life.
- Make a conscious choice: "Which attitude will I live by?"