

Practising what we Preach

Finding Joy in the Journey (7)

Philippians 3.17 – 4.9

1. We instinctively copy the example of those around us, from learning how to speak, to our everyday habits (good or bad). So Paul says: **keep your eyes on those who live as a model** (3.17). We need to make sure we keep good company, and support each other on the journey.
2. Not everyone is on Jesus' side: he has enemies (3.18). These are people whose **god is their stomach** (3.19); in other words, they make gratifying their desires (physical or otherwise) the most important thing in their life: **their mind is set on earthly things** (3.19).
3. But Christians should be different. **Our citizenship is in heaven**, and we **eagerly await** Jesus to come from there (3.20) in all his power (3.21).
4. So once again, Paul **pleads** with the Philippians: **stand firm, be of one mind** (4.1-2). He is desperate for them to live out their faith, to be what they are, to let the truth of who they are in Jesus bubble up to the surface so it is clear for all to see.
5. **Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice!** (4.4) When the Bible repeats itself we need to pay special attention. This is not the power of positive thinking, but delight and pleasure **in**: Jesus.
6. In a sometimes difficult to hear teaching, Paul says **do not be anxious about anything** (4.6). And yet elsewhere he freely admits his **anxiety for all his churches** (2 Corinthians 11.28). Experiencing negative emotions is part of everyday human existence: it's what we *do* with them that makes the difference. So Paul says: **in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God** (4.6).
7. But he *also* tells us to **think about whatever is noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy** (4.8), and to **put into practice** everything we have **learned** or **heard** or **seen** in him (4.9).

8. If we work hard to do both these things (pray with thanksgiving and train ourselves to follow good examples), Paul says **the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus** (4.7), and **the God of peace will be with you** (4.9).

For Reflection

1. Whose *good* example do you follow in your daily life? Who do you look to for spiritual guidance, encouragement and challenge?
- 2(a). Whose *bad* example do you need to avoid, and if you can't remove yourself from those circumstances, what can you / we do to help that?
- 2(b). Do you allow your desires to be the most important thing in your life? What can you do to make Jesus number one? (Hint: this is one area that fasting can make a huge difference, especially done as a group.)
3. What does it mean to be a citizen of somewhere?
4. What difference does your faith make in your daily life? If you took your faith away, would your life look any different?
5. If you are struggling at the moment, what might help you to lift your eyes up and see Jesus? If you are feeling strong at the moment, make sure you give thanks to God for that!
6. What do you do when you feel anxious? Do you pray?
7. Are you deliberate about being a follower of Jesus, about what you think about and do – do you deliberately focus yourself on Jesus?
8. Do you want to know the peace of God? Are you willing to put your faith into practice, to be constant in prayer – **in every situation** (4.6) – so that **the peace of God will guard your heart and mind in Jesus**?