

Inspired by Christ

Who inspires you? Who inspires or profoundly influences the way you live and think? I wonder who comes to mind? Parent, grandparent, political figure from past – Churchill or from the present Mandela. World leader in your field – educationalist or scientist or engineer or management guru. Might think - actually there are very few who inspire me now.

Can I suggest someone? Jesus! I know it seems obvious, it is the classic Sunday school question answer. But I would be interested, even amongst of group of folks like ourselves who go to church, to know how many of us had Jesus as our no. 1 inspirational person. I know when I was thinking about it he did not come to mind first. Maybe that is because we put Jesus in another category – he is God and so on... Interesting isn't it. I felt ashamed when I realised it, maybe you too. So if you are like me then let's redress the balance together.

Paul is a man inspired by Christ and Christ's inspiration gives him

A transforming view
A transforming love
A transforming prayer

Open bibles with me

A transforming view (vs 3-6)

Paul is stuck in prison and what do we find him doing? Moping? Working on a strategy to get out? Pleading for someone to get money together to get him a lawyer? He is writing, teaching, evangelising the guards, praying and rejoicing– thanking God!

This guy is facing imprisonment and possibly death and this is what he is doing. Does he have a character constitution of granite? No he has the Spirit and light of Christ inspiring and transforming his view of the situation. For Paul – God is in control and as we will see in later weeks it is a win win situation for him – if he lives great more churches planted more lives transformed by the gospel and if he dies – no problem he's off to heaven which he is being prepared for anyway! And so rather than being weighed down by the present situation his spirit is lifted by his understanding of God.

If we had a view of God like that how would our lives be different? There's a question to ponder!

He's like the guy who has got a second chance at life. God has given him a totally new life – past forgiven, new identity and purpose and now he is just thankful (vs 3).

Paul is also a prayerful man, we can see that (vs 4) – he loves to talk with his Lord, be in the presence of

his Lord. The church at Philippi are on his prayer list, along with many other churches either he planted or were planted by others. He starts his prayers with thanksgiving even to the churches he has a tense relationship with such as the church in Corinth.

The whole idea of giving thanks for folks can change our view of them. We all can end up with a character clash or something that creates tension in a relationship at work or in church and so on. If we prayed for them with and gave thanks for them (their strengths, gifts and so on) it would probably change our view of them. Being thankful in prayer is right because we are acknowledging thanks to God but it can also change our perspective on things.

Another way that Christ has inspired or affected Paul's view is that he has a heightened awareness of fellowship. He is prayerful, thankful and joyful because he has this sense of partnership or literally fellowship in the gospel (vs 5). They may be on his prayer list but he is on their missionary partners list. From Paul's perspective he is writing to a church who have adopted him – who love him, pray for him and support his ministry in a way no other church does. From their perspective they are receiving a letter from their mission partner. They have fellowship or partnership in the gospel and have done so for 10 years.

It is my hope that we will adopt Sid and Jean Garland as our mission partners and support them in different

ways. I think we were all touched by having them come and share something of the needs in that part of the world. (Sid's bookstore and shop attacked) But I would hope that we would in time have 'mission partner' on every continent.

When I was a 'missionary' in Poland, just after the revolution there, home churches were praying, corresponding, sending packages with bits and bobs – tokens of love and care. What an enormous difference it made. There was a fellowship in the gospel. Though some of them could not go on mission like that they could partner in it through prayer and so on. That is an area I would like us to develop in following the pattern of the early church.

His view of God in Christ is also transformed. He realised that God is not fickle

Vs 6 being confident of this that he who began a good work in us will see it through to completion until the day of Christ Jesus

God does not lose interest in us. From before time those who would be his own were known and talked about in heaven. Through the cross he has had plans and purposes for us since countless ages past that will last for countless ages to come. God has an unparalleled interest in us. As the Triune God they agreed that The Father would send The son to the cross of Calvary to make it happen. We might give

up on ourselves, we might give up on the church but God does not give up on his true church. The good work he began in us is of course the salvation of our souls and having received him as saviour and Lord and received that salvation he will see it through so that salvation process will lead us to the gates of heaven and beyond. God does not help us to become Christians and say, 'right see you in heaven' and leave us to get on with it. No he gives us his Holy Spirit as teacher, guide, encourager, equipper and enabler and what we need to do is learn to lean on him to let him encourage and strengthen our faith.

Pole climbers for overhead telephone and electricity cables used to have to use a leather strap round their waste to climb up. The secret to using them was to lean back into the strap. If you didn't you wouldn't get a grip with your spikes on the pole.

The secret to growth on the Christian life is just that. Learning to lean back on the one who promises to support you. To trust the one who is utterly trustworthy. Are you like me and need in just that little bit more?

I don't know if you ever think – man I am a rubbish Christian and think God has given up? This verse is a reminder that he does not give up. God has the tenacity of glue. He'll stick with you even if you think you've come unstuck from him! Be encouraged – God's not finished with us yet!

A transforming love (vs 7-8)

The Roman Empire stretched from the Middle East to Britain and took in the northern skirting of Africa. It was huge and diverse. It was full of social divisions and hierarchies. Latin was the written language but many spoke Greek – the language of the previous great empire. The Greeks considered the Romans upstarts and the Romans thought of themselves were the bees knees. There was a massive slave culture it is estimated that at the time of writing 20% of the population were slaves equivalent 30 folks out of this group, former soldiers were given land all over the empire to re-inforce the pax romana. There were of course the rich and poor and into the mix the of the church the Jewish / Gentile (non-jewish) division.

The social and racial divisions that were in the Empire were in the church but they managed to overcome them through confessing one Lord, one saviour and one salvation.

We can see from Acts that in the church in Philippi there was a rich foreign business woman, a jailer (prison officer) a former fortune teller and so on. A real mixed bag but they found unity in the gospel. And more than that they found genuine Christian love and affection for one another. Paul, Jewish by background, would have an inbuilt dislike and suspicion of non-Jews. But the gospel that had

captured his heart overrides and transforms those destructive instincts.

In our fellowship we are a mixed bag. We have business folks, folks with links in prison work, cleaners, carers, teachers, doctors, students, nurses, retired, housemum's. Northern Irish, German, English, Chinese, Indian, Australian, Teuchter's, lowlanders, west coaster, east coasters and so on. Young, middle ages and senior! Things that can set us apart from one another but like the church of old we can set these things aside, our natural prejudices, and unite around the commonalities in our lives – not least our humanity but more importantly our commitment to Christ, his glory and the up building of his kingdom in word and action. As in verse 7 we are recipient of God's grace and grace, graciousness and love and genuine affection should mark our meeting and coming together – over riding any natural prejudices such as racism we may have.

What type of person do you take a natural dislike to? The gospel you follow should be transforming that view. There is no room for cliques and snootiness in the family of God. Paul models for us genuine Christian fellowship and love.

A transforming prayer (vs9-11)

In many ways the church in Philippi is a good model for us but interestingly they are facing a couple of

issues – Chapter 4 reveals a bit of disunity and discouragement probably because Paul is in prison. That is the background of his prayer for them.

Notice firstly what he does not pray for them – he does not pray that their faith may abound more and more though it could easily fit in there no he prays

Philippians 1:9-11 *that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God.*

He focuses in on their love. Interesting. Why that? Jesus told a man that the two greatest commandment were, as we sang with the children – love the Lord your God and love your neighbour. There are two directions there – upward and outward. So is Paul praying that their love for God and for one another and for their neighbour to increase? Notice again that what he is talking about is not just sentimentalism he brings focus to how that love is to grow – in knowledge and depth of insight. A growing love that fosters a better knowledge of God and one another and a deepening insight into the ways of God and how that works out in our daily lives so that we will be able to discern what is best and by pure/blameless/holy/saints/set apart/ different in God's way.

So the logic is if we grow in love for God we will grow in knowledge of him and therefore be better at knowing his ways in a given situation so as to follow the best way and keep from sin and do good – bringing glory and praise to God. Bearing fruit for the Kingdom – fruit of righteousness.

Proverbs 11:29-30 ²⁹ *He who brings trouble on his family will inherit only wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise.* ³⁰ *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.*

Somehow as we honour God with our lives other people lives are touched and souls are saved. Wow. Godly loving and living will enhance our sharing of the good news. Of course it will. People will see the authenticity and sincerity of our faith.

In the ancient world vases were used for many things and there were a variety of types – the cheap ones were made thick clay and solid and did not require much skill. Fine pottery was much tricky to make but they would fetch a high price. Vases were prone to cracking before and after firing so some would just fill in the cracks with hard pearly wax, that was almost undetectable after painting. But the more discerning could hold it up to the light and see the cracks. So the more honest dealers would mark the pots with the words 'sine cera' which means without wax. Sine cera – sincere.

Our lives have cracks in them, we are not perfect but we are not to paint over them putting on masks and pretending to be that which we are not – that is hypocrisy and that will stem any fruit bearing. No our lives are to abound in love and growing sincerity and authenticity. Our lives in Christ and inspired by Him will be continually transforming our view of life, our love for God and others and will by his grace become a tree of life to which others might come and find the life now and life eternal Christ offers to those who will receive him.