

**TUESDAY 5/19/20**

**SERIES: Choosing Faith Over Fear**

**Speaker: Nat Crawford (w/Arnie & Cara)**

**Title: Leveraging Your Trials Pt. 2 (Paul)**

A friend of mine told me this past year, “I’ve known you for many years and you’ve experienced a lot of disappointments and a lot of setbacks. But you never took your eyes off of the goal. You have been driven to accomplish your call no matter what.” He’s right. I tend to be single-focused.

Though I’m no athlete, I think that’s why I admire professional athletes. They are focused, so they train and train and train. They are focused on improving their skills. They’re focused on winning. They look at the goal and don’t take their eyes off the prize.

This was Paul’s strategy as well. But what is that prize? Why did that prize motivate him? Let’s find out in Philippians 1:19.

<sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, <sup>20</sup> as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (ESV, Phil.1:19-21)

Former Bible Teacher and friend Warren Wiersbe said, “Because of Paul’s chains, Christ was *known*, and because of Paul’s critics, Christ was *preached*. But because of Paul’s crisis, Christ was *magnified*.” That summarizes chapter 1 of Philippians. Paul is in prison, but because of that, he had a captive audience and that audience came to know Christ. That audience became a movement of disciple-making disciples. But as we learn from verses 15-19, Paul refers to his critics who preach Christ for all the wrong reasons, but even so Christ’s message was proclaimed. And here Paul is putting the focus back where it belongs: on Christ. It’s not about Paul. It’s not about any human. It’s all about God-in-the-flesh, Jesus Christ.

### **DISCUSSION:**

N: Now I want to stop right there and bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney to talk about this celebrity obsessed culture we live in. That obsession leads to both idolatry and also bigotry. Hebrews 11 has its own heroes of faith, but it really wasn't about the people, but rather about God. So how do you see the celebrity culture impacting believers?

C: Well, I find the whole celebrity worship very strange. You know, you really notice it, especially during this whole COVID 19 thing that's going on. People will listen to medical advice from an actor who played a doctor, over an actual doctor, and it's so bizarre. And then you know, you get on Twitter and things, and you know when it comes to theology, you have actors who maybe grew up in the church, or whatever, but they're giving their theological opinions. Okay. And somehow people override someone who's gone to seminary, and done things where they've actually studied Greek and Hebrew. Somehow this celebrity has more insight on what the Bible says, than what somebody who's studied it most of their life says. To me, it blows my

mind. And you just have to be very careful not to try to argue, because you know, people are watching. So you kind of make your point, if you feel the need to respond or not, but you're not going to argue anyone into the Kingdom, so you just kind of let it go. It's hard though.

N: It is. I think your point is well taken, and I think at the end of the day, Christians are easily swayed by the culture and by the opinions of celebrities. The real thing that we need to do as believers is look to God's Word first and foremost. What does the Bible have to say about this topic? And then weigh whatever that celebrity, or even that Bible teacher is saying, but they need to go back to the Word of God ultimately, in order to decide what is true and what is false. Arnie, I've got a question for you. How do you see the celebrity culture impacting the church?

A: You know, that's a great question. We just finished doing a bunch of research on this COVID thing, and one of the things we found is that celebrity pastors, their listenership has skyrocketed. There's about 10 of them, and those guys are predicting after we get done with this COVID 19, the church is going to grow by three or 400%. But what our research shows, is that the celebrity pastors did attract more, and they even attracted people, the core of the church, like 20% of those people, were actually watching the celebrity pastors instead of their own church. And we're just totally infatuated, not only congregants, but sorry Nat, even pastors are influenced by celebrity pastors.

N: No, and it's true. The reality is when a celebrity that you appreciate or admire, for whatever reason, it doesn't matter if it's a celebrity preacher, teacher, pastor, or just talk show host, or whatever. There are people that we are naturally attracted to, and when they say something, we take it as gospel, when the reality is, we still need to evaluate it in light of Scripture. And what you said is what I read as well. They're saying that 25% of believers now will not return to church. They'll stick to the online method and they'll kind of gravitate to wherever they go. But you know, we've talked a lot about this idea of ministry or misery. One of the things that I thought was really cool about coming here to Back to the Bible, is the fact that we're a resource not just for individuals, but we're also a resource for churches, who do want to reach those congregants who now have said, you know what? I don't think I'm going to go back to church as often physically as I did before. Do you want to just share a moment about some of the cool technology and the resources we're giving away to churches?

A: One thing that we've done is we've focused on the small church, not the mega church, and the one thing the small church can do better than anybody else is have this body of believers or this community.

And what we've been able to do through technology is to extend that beyond the walls of their church, so that you can be a true body of believers to anybody wherever they are, to the people that you serve. And we do this as a ministry. We don't charge churches for it, and we've had great success with that as well.

N: Yeah. Explain a little bit about what we're doing though for the churches, because some people might be thinking, okay, that's really cool. I've got a small church, but what exactly are you doing?

A: We have the capability to help disciple a congregation individually. And then also we have the capability, through our BTTB.app to do small groups, to do sermons, all kinds of group activities, inside the platform, so that you can have people come to your website, and you can track them over time and help disciple them both in the group, and in the individual experience as well.

N: And one of the things I've read recently, is they're finding out that the open door or the front

door to churches today is online. And so this is a great way to get people to check out your church, and to get them plugged in right away, is through some of the resources we have here at Back to the Bible.

Before we turn back to the message, I'd like to talk about pointing glory back to Christ, instead of ourselves. That was Paul's M.O. He was so passionate about saying, look, it's not about me. It's not about what I've done in the past. It's not about what I can do. It is all about Christ. Why is that so important for us to do as believers?

C: Well for me personally, I have a lot of shortcomings. So other than breathing and growing hair, I have to depend on God to pretty much do everything in my life.

N: I have the same struggles.

C: Writing books and stuff. I mean it's just crazy, because I have a learning problem with comprehension, and He has me writing books, so it's not in my own power. I just think it's really important to realize that anything you have is because of the Lord. So just always pointing people to Him, no matter what situation you're in, too.

N: Good. Arnie, what are your thoughts?

A: Yeah, it's tricky because the temptation is in doing your testimony, it becomes all about you and not all about Jesus. And that's hard for some people, especially when they try to witness and all of that. But I think those of us especially that have come to know Christ at a later age, you're more thankful. You realize what a spiritual loser you are. There's not even a question that it's all about me, because you know you're the biggest spiritual loser in the world. And if it wasn't for Jesus, you'd be totally lost. But there's a big group of people who I call it "*I trouble*", not E, Y, E, but just the capital I, it's all about me, and my ministry, and what I gave up for the Lord. It just isn't helpful when people put themselves in the way of their testimony.

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Paul wasn't a super hero. He wasn't a person who had some insider pathway to God or His grace. He wasn't perfect. What he had is what we had: a Savior, who by grace, radically changed his life. That's it. But because of that fact, Christ became his focus. His obsession. That's why Paul could say that famous line: "to live is Christ, but to die is gain."

If you're in Christian circles enough, you know that old joke about asking Sunday school kids questions: Who is God's son? Jesus. Who died for sins? Jesus. What goes bow wow and wags his tail? Jesus.

Paul was kind of that way. Everything was about Christ and for Christ. That's why he could sit in prison and be content. He could focus on sharing the hope that he had in the face of many great challenges.

I mean, think about this. Paul in Philippians 3:8 said, "[I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.](#)" Paul was a man who humanly speaking, and even religiously speaking, had all the accomplishments. But once he met a risen Christ, it changed it all. He quickly realized it was all rubbish. The Greek word for rubbish is actually a slang word for excrement. Today we might blush or ask Paul not to use such language. But he wanted to be clear, look, everything apart from Christ, no matter how seemingly great, it's all trash. To Paul, Christ was that precious.

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: Now that you've had a lesson in Greek curse words, Cara, what's your takeaway from Paul's perspective on life? *To live is Christ and to die is gain.*

C: I like Paul's perspective. We've spoken about it before. Arnie addressed it a while back about coming to faith later in age. Once I met the risen Christ, everything outside of living for Him is poop. And I really realized how much that is true. It's just an awesome adventure to be on when you decide to follow Christ. And there's not much else up ahead that isn't fantastic, because then *to die is gain.*

N: And I think that's a hard lesson for us to really believe, especially when some of us have accomplished so much, or when we've had a certain level of, I would say earthly success. But the reality is at the end of the day, those don't define us and that's not how God finds value in us. So Arnie, do you think that Paul is saying that everything else in life is garbage, or is it just the things we use for religion, and the things we use for the approval of others?

A: I think he's saying it's religion in itself is garbage, which is interesting, because Paul was one smart, brilliant dude, well trained. And for him to say it means nothing, that's pretty amazing. A lot of very smart people that are Christ followers, would have a hard time saying those words that Paul said.

N: I think you're right. It really didn't have to do with the other things of life, the things we would find valuable. But he's saying the things that we think are so important to God, the religious activity that is not connected to heart, the things that we do to try to get approval from God. When God says, I love you regardless, I love you in spite of your sinful nature. I love you just the way you are. Quit trying to think that your behavior is going to get you an extra measure of love from me. That's not going to do it. It's that religiosity. It's those things that you thought made you so wonderful to me. That is all garbage. So do you think Paul would approve of leisure time or hobbies? I mean, I love to play video games. I love a good game of golf. Would Paul say that's a sin?

A: I think he'd say golf was a sin. He'd say golf was a sin. It takes so much time. Yeah. [Laughter] Video games. Yeah.

C: I think video games, he's totally cool with.

N: Oh yeah. Wow. I want you two to debate. All right. Defend yourself. Go.

C: [Laughter] Arnie and I are often disagreeing. No, I mean as long as whatever your hobby is, is honoring to God. If God is number one priority in your life, he does want you to enjoy yourself. He wants you to have your quiet time. He wants you to enjoy things that you love. He built you a certain way to enjoy certain hobbies. So yeah, I mean, Paul's not going to disapprove of that at all. And it's awesome when your hobbies, you can find ways to glorify God through your hobbies. You know, out on the golf course, if you're taking foursomes out, and you're talking about the Lord and things like that, I think it's awesome.

N: I think that's what we've talked about so much, is leveraging the things we love to advance the Gospel and to glorify God. That's the real key of it. Before we go back to our message, how do you guys live out that mindset of, *to live is Christ*? How do you manifest that in your lives?

C: Well, I try to make everything purposeful, to bring glory to Him or to honor Him. You know, sometimes I'll fall short on that. Sometimes I shirk on things, and veg out, and do like a marathon

of, you know, investigation TV or something. But you know, I just try to do everything as purposeful as I can.

A: Yeah. Same with me. It's just daily. It's, I love the life and the path that the Lord has me on, and I am a hard charger and just love it.

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So Paul's focus is Christ. But what's the goal? Let's turn back to Philippians 1:22.

<sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. <sup>24</sup> But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. (Vs. 22-26)

I often read verse 22-23 and think to myself, it's clear that Paul was single. As a parent, I long for Heaven, but I always think, but not until I see my kids graduate, or get married, or have kids, or something else.

Paul was so Christ focused he had little to hold him back from desiring Heaven with Christ, except for the work that God called him to. And that's exactly what he said. He desired to be with his Savior, face to face. But there is still work to be done for the Kingdom. So that's what he would do. Until Christ called him home, he would spread the Gospel and help church-planters and missionaries do the same.

But I think here we find Paul's motivation. He did it all for Christ. Christ was His focus. But that motivation was the future with Christ in Heaven.

Oliver Wendall Holmes said, "some people are too heavenly minded to be any earthly good." I think he'd be hard pressed to say that today. I'd challenge you that people are too earthly minded to be any heavenly good. We're so caught up in trials and triumphs. We're so focused on success and comfort. We're so concerned about loss and discomfort.

In some ways, what we've experienced in 2020 is a much-needed reality check. We've had the best economy in ages, if not in history. In America, we've had more than enough of well, everything. But overnight, not one area of our lives wasn't threatened by uncertainty. I mean, toilet paper was once something we felt the freedom to take and throw into people's trees. Now, it's more valuable than gold! So, we've had so much comfort that we've decreased our desire and effectiveness for missional living. So now we're reevaluating our lives. That's a good thing.

Why was Paul postured for contentment? He kept very few things to distract him from keeping his eyes on Christ and moving towards his prize in Heaven.

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: So I want to pause again and bring Arnie and Cara back into the discussion. How do you guys keep your eyes on Christ, and keep your prize Heavenly?

C: Well, I remind myself that Christ is the only thing in my life that cannot be taken from me. That He can't die, can't be taken away. I can't lose Him. Why would I try to put a claim on anything else as mine? I have the Lord and that gives me comfort. He's not going anywhere.

Everything else can go away at any time.

A: Yeah, I would add that He will never leave you or forsake you. I mean, what else do you want? I mean, it's awesome.

C: Amen.

N: So why do you think we struggle with that so much? I mean, it's easy to say and it's easy to quote a Bible verse. I do it all the time, but then when the trial comes, when we are chosen, where we have to choose between faith or fear, it's a lot harder. So why is that, do you think?

C: Because we love people in our lives. I love my husband more than, you know, after the Lord, more than anything. And my kids, that's scary to think that something might happen to them. But I choose faith, that everything's going to be redeemed later on, because God said so. So I just stick with that.

A: No, I agree a hundred percent. Well said.

N: I remember in 1999, it was my senior year of high school, and I had this incredibly sweet and sexy Chevy Camaro, white with black tee tops. And I remember a friend asking me, what are you willing to give up, you know, for Christ? I mean, if God asks you to give up something, you know, what would it be? And I listed, you know, I'll give away, yeah, maybe my house, because I don't own it anyway. Or maybe some of my comic books, or whatever it was. And then my buddy pauses and he goes, what about your car? Would you be okay giving up your car for the sake of Christ? And I'm like, I remember in the Bible study, I'm like, yeah, yeah, why wouldn't I, yeah, it's Christ. I remember thinking to myself, you are a lying snake, because of my heart. I was like, no way would I give up this car. And this car was, yeah, I mean, but that thing was good looking, and I looked good in it. But I think the reality is, we all have these things that we cling to, that become idols in our lives, and we need to keep taking our eyes off of the item, putting our eyes back on the prize.

I know you guys are familiar with David Platt and with Francis Chan, and those two guys wrote books. David Platt wrote the book *Radical* and Francis Chan wrote the book *Crazy Love* and I love those two books. They've had a huge impact on my life and on ministry. And if I could summarize those books, it would be this: *Radical* says sell your things and go. And it's very different. It's like sell your things and go, that's it. No debate. *Crazy Love*, it would be, you know, should I sell my things and go? Maybe pray about it, and then decide. I'm probably closer to Chan's perspective, you know, pray about it. But I think as Christians, we all need to be willing to let things go, giving it all up for the sake of the Gospel, because that is the thing that really matters. But that is so much harder to do, than it is to say.

C: Well I am willing, but it better be a pretty audible, sell your stuff.

N: Right. [Laughter] And a lot of times, most of the time, we won't get that, but we can receive good counsel from other people. But I do think we are all called to be willing to go whenever and wherever He calls.

A: Now let me remind you two, that it says, *as you already are going*.

N: Well, and I'm proud Arnie, most people would not recognize or remember, you know, it's *while going*, it wasn't a *therefore go*. It's really *while going*. So good job.

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Paul says, “to live is Christ and to die is gain.” If we are going to choose faith over fear—if we are going to choose joy in the face of trials and disappointments—if we are going to choose ministry over misery, then we need to embrace Paul’s focus on Christ and keep our hope on the prize: Eternity with Christ in Heaven

Paul wrote in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” The pain and suffering we face in this life is real. It’s not an illusion like Hinduism teaches. It’s very real. It hurts. The pain, the trial, the disappointments you’re experiencing today, they’re real. And I’m sorry. Yet compared to eternity with our Savior, they pale in comparison.

One of the hardest things I experience as a father is when my children experience pain. My middle son has had 14 surgeries in 10 years. I don’t care how good it is for him, it still hurts to see him scared and in pain. I remember when he was about 7 or 8, and he was lying in his hospital bed crying, because they couldn’t find a vein. He looked in my eyes with tears streaming down his face. I hated it. I still hate it. He didn’t understand why he was experiencing so much hurt and pain. What he failed to understand is that moment, and honestly days of pain, would result in a future that was so much better.

I imagine this is what it’s like for God, our Heavenly Father. He sees us experience pain and suffering. We can try to run away and take matters into our own hands. We can choose fear. We can choose misery. But then we miss out on the earthly joy of walking with Christ. We miss out on doing ministry. We miss out on growing in our faith. And we miss out on the rewards in Heaven.

Paul said in order to push through the pain and keep going for the prize, that the Spirit helps us in our weakness. He says in Romans 8:26-27, “we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because<sup>[g]</sup> the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

Friends, when we focus on Christ and we keep Heaven as our prize, we show the world around us that our faith is real and there is real hope. We act like a beacon of light that points straight to Christ. Or better yet, we act like the zoom on your camera.

To the world God is small. To the world Christ is small. But as we go through the trials and the crisis, we will be that beacon of light that points to Christ. It takes their eyes off of the problem and focused on Christ. By choosing faith over fear, we act like a zoom and magnify Christ, so Christ is bigger than any problem or trial anyone could face.

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N: Arnie, we covered a lot of ground today. We saw how Paul's focus was uncanny. He kept his focus on Christ and his prize, his eternity, with his Lord. How does that message help you today?

A: I mean, it's everything. You have to keep focused on Christ. That's everything there is. That's the only thing there is. It's a tremendous message and it's tremendously helpful to stay focused, especially in these times was so many distractions.

N: Cara, you know this. It's so much easier said than done, but thankfully, as Paul said, the Spirit is there to help us. How does the Spirit help us?

C: So many times, I'm sure everyone has experienced this. I've gone to God and I've said, I don't even know what to pray for. I don't even know how to pray for this situation. So I know that when I can't verbalize it, that's when the Holy Spirit is going to intercede for me.

N: Yeah, the reality is we don't do it alone. We don't have to do it alone. But we have to be willing to let the Holy Spirit do His work in our lives.