**LOCKED DOWN OR LIFTED UP?**

**Lessons From Paul in Prison**

by Robert Pulliam

The recent “lockdown” of our normal lives continues to cause inconvenience, financial hardship, and disappointment to everyone. Markets imploding, events cancelled, fear of the future, even a lack of toilet paper! If we were together this Sunday, I believe we would try to encourage one another from the Word of God. I also believe that there are bright spots in recent events, however dim they may appear at this time.

Years ago there was a silly song on the radio called “Making The Best Of A Bad Situation.” It recounted unfortunate circumstances in which the recipient found a silver lining. One woman told of her loco husband who believed he was a chicken. He tottered around the house clucking and flapping his wings. When asked if she’d considered finding a doctor that could make him well, she replied, “Well yes I have, but you know, he doesn’t eat much, and all that pecking around don’t hurt nothin’, and heaven knows we can use the eggs.”

In all seriousness, we are hard pressed to find good news today. In the book of Philippians, we see the Apostle Paul “making the best of a bad situation.” From a Roman prison he writes to the church at Philippi with *joy* as his recurring theme. Read chapter one and notice all the things that are his silver lining in the middle of a dark cloud. In the midst of his confinement, Paul used his time in “lockdown” to lift up his Christian family. Notice seven encouragements:

**1) GIVE THANKS. – v. 3** *“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you…”* Even in the depths of a Roman prison, Paul was able to give thanks. Here I sit in the comfort of my modern home, with all my conveniences, plenty of food, a warm fire, and as of this moment my health. If I cannot find a reason to give thanks, then something is drastically wrong. God’s blessings continue, even in the darkness, even when we don’t acknowledge them. The warmth of the sun, the snow and rain, home and family, abundant food, good friends, and work that I enjoy, all are blessings that I dare not take for granted. Take a moment to reflect on the positive side of the ledger. Ask your family what they are grateful for and tell God about it. *“In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”* (1Thess. 5:18).

**2) ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER. – v. 6** *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ…”* Paul encourages his readers with the fact that God has a continuing, broader purpose for each of their lives. What a blessing to know that I matter to God! I remember the encouragement It brought when my Dad would praise me for a job well done. Some guy at the parts store would make a remark about his little helper and he would proudly claim that I was his right hand man. What an encouragement for me to keep learning and growing to become a man! In the “busi-ness” of life, what is it you have left unsaid? In your household, who needs your encouraging words?

**3) AFFIRM YOUR LOVE. – vs. 7-8** *“… I have you in my heart … For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.”* My daughter has four children, the youngest of which has been difficult from the day he was born. That three year old offensive lineman is often obstinate during their hectic lifestyle of work, school, church and sports. My daughter shared that, when life as they knew it came to a halt and everyone was forced to stay home, little Parker is the happiest he’s ever been! He probably has everything he ever wanted: all of his loved ones in their proper place, at home. Don’t miss this opportunity to spend time with your family, and reaffirm your love. God has providentially given you some extra time to spend with your loved ones. Play a game, read a book, bake some cookies – make the most of it. Affirm your love with the gift of time.

**4) PRAY SPECIFICALLY. – vs. 9-11** *“And this I pray…”* **v. 4** *“always in every prayer…”* You can’t watch things fall down around you without feeling a sense of frustration and anxiety. Do you put a voice to that emotion and pray? Instead of pacing the floor with frustration and anxiety, Paul found great comfort in praying for his spiritual offspring in Philippi. Although he was helpless to do anything for them himself, he asked God to do specific things in their lives. He prayed that they would grow in knowledge and discernment; that they would make good choices; and that they would continually do right, which glorifies God. (Wow! A model prayer for our government!) What are you asking God to do for your spouse? Your children? Your grandchildren? God often used plagues, pestilences, oppression, military defeat, hunger and thirst to bring His people back to Himself. (Example: Israel and the entire Old Testament.) It is often serious trouble that motivates us to pray. May this experience drive us to prayer.

**5) GOD USES BAD EVENTS FOR GOOD. – vs. 12-20** *“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel…”* Paul has been beaten, abused, falsely accused, sentenced indefinitely to prison, and he somehow finds this to be GOOD! Incredible! He recognizes that God has a higher purpose that supersedes his suffering, and actually puts it to good use. Paul is in bonds, but the gospel is prospering because of it! Don’t discount the good that can come from our nation being humbled physically, financially and emotionally. God will use this difficult time for His purpose. We need to be reminded that God is still in control (Colossians 1:16-18) and He works all things together for good. (Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28.)

**6) MAKE CHRIST YOUR FOCUS. – vs. 21** *“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* The worst thing that can happen to you is not that you will die of the Coronavirus. The worst thing that can happen is that you will ignore Christ, reject His gospel, and miss heaven. However, the believer’s worst case scenario is to end up in heaven! When you can’t see the way ahead, look upon Christ. Read of the days when He walked on this earth with broken, sick and sinful men. Listen to His words of comfort to the widow of Nain, to Mary and Martha, to His disciples in the upper room. Watch the scenes unfold as He turns water into wine, as He commands the storm to be still, as He emerges victorious from the grave. Be amazed as He gives new sight to the blind man, new flesh to the lepers, and new life to Lazarus.[[1]](#footnote-2) Now is the time to be *“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith…”* (Heb. 12:2).

**7) STAND WITHOUT FEAR. – vs. 27-28** *“stand fast … not in any way terrified by your adversaries…”* Fear causes panic buying in the store. Fear causes the markets to plummet. Fear causes people to withdraw from others and retreat from their responsibilities. Paul reminds Timothy that “*God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love and of a sound mind*” (2Tim. 1:7). This is a great opportunity to display sound thinking and genuine love to those around us. Be cautious, be wise, be responsible, but don’t be afraid. Over three hundred and fifty times the Scripture says, *“Fear not…”* or *“Be not afraid…”* Encourage your family that we are trusting God and that we don’t need to fear. *“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand”* (Isa. 41:10).

**PAUL’S LOCKDOWN LIST:**

1) Give thanks! Ask your family what they are thankful for.

2) Encourage one another. Don’t leave important things unsaid.

3) Affirm your love. Give your family the gift of time.

4) Pray specifically. Pray together as a family for one another and our nation.

5) Recognize that God uses our trials for good.

6) Make Christ your focus. Spend time in the gospels getting to know Him.

7) Stand without fear. Our Father has promised never to leave or forsake us.

Are you locked down or lifted up? Many of us are working from home, or continuing our job as usual. At my house, the calves are still being born, irrigation water is still on its way, we still like to eat, and the laundry still piles up. However, we are home every night of the week for the first time in forty years! Let me encourage you to make the most of this time by making the best of a bad situation.

1. Luke 7:11-15; John 11:20-27; John 14:1-6; John 2:1-11; Mark 4:39; Mark 6; John 9; Luke 17:12-19; John 11:41-44 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)