

Ron Armstrong • April 18 & 19, 2020

Letters from Prison: Sunshine on a Cloudy Day

Philip. 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: [2] Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3] I thank my God every time I remember you. [4] In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy [5] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, [6] being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ...

[7] It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. [8] God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

[9] And this is my prayer: 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.

A. Can you feel good during bad times?

1. The two critical facts of Philippians are that Paul is in prison and the church is in trouble.
2. Paul's reactions to these "cloudy" times:
 - a. Prayers of thanksgiving.
 - b. Prayer with joy.
 - c. Gratitude for blessings and relationship.
 - d. Prayer for others.
3. Cloudy times aren't all the same. Examples:
 - a. Clinical depression. It can be brought on by chemical needs, physical needs, or severe circumstances. It's a medical issue that needs medical help.

- b. Painful problems that you know are going to resolve but feel overwhelming.
- c. Painful problems that will always be painful. Life-changing loss is the most common.
- d. Reactivity problems. This category covers the vast majority of "people" problems. Symptoms: anger, harshness, sensitivity, anxiety, fear, coping with change.

B. Lowering reactivity raises contentment. 3 goals:

1. Low fusion (Maturity): This is the ability to separate what we feel from what we think or say. It's the ability to be calm and rational when our emotions are stirred.
2. High differentiation (Wisdom):
 - a. Seeing where we end and others begin.
 - b. My responsibility is separate from yours.
 - c. I am not the center of others' stories.
3. Low reactivity (Self-control): Reactivity is the response people have to a perceived threat. It initiates the "fight or flight" response.
 - a. Why do I feel threatened? If it's not obvious, check your meta-narrative. (Desire to control, to be right, and to look good.)
 - b. Is there a real threat? Most perceived threats are not real and often not about us.
 - c. Are they feeling threatened? If so, how can I reassure them?
 - d. The "fight or flight" response doesn't help unless physical violence is imminent. Commit to moderating it and letting it pass.
 - e. Commit to the calm, rational place that helps you make good choices, protect relationships, and grow.