

If there's one feature of modern life that has my hackles rising, it's the habit of younger people using the word *whatever!* It's a modern phenomenon and behind that one word with the tossing of the head, the rolling of the eyes and the tone of voice is a younger person telling you to get lost! *Whatever* means I don't care about what you're saying because I don't really respect you. *Whatever* conveys a lack of hope and an attitude of *I couldn't care less!* I don't know where this term came from but I sense that we are living in a *Whatever* society. That *Whatever* attitude takes all shapes and forms, some good and bad. Some people say: *Whatever* happens is predestined and there's nothing we can do about it. *Whatever* happens is God's plan and I either earned it or I deserve it. *Whatever* happens is bad because the universe is evil which means it's not my fault. *Whatever* happens, happens because we live in an irrational universe. *Whatever* happens is what I make happen because it's only me that matters.

There are lots of *Whatevers* in our world today. But this morning I want us to look at God's *Whatever*, and we find it in Paul's letter to the Church at Philippi. Let's read verses 8 and 9 of the passage again: ***Finally beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.***

Those last two verse are the focus for today because they talk about living a life of God's *Whatever*. In these two verses Paul gives us the attributes for living a life of God's *Whatever*. He says it involves Rejoicing, Giving Thanks and Staying Focused.

First, **How do we attain these attributes?** Some of you may be thinking that's okay for Paul because he didn't live in the world today and he could rejoice and give thanks any time he wanted. What does Paul know about life today?'

We forget the circumstances under which Paul wrote these things. He wasn't some minister like me sitting in his nice warm manse writing a pie in the sky letter to his favourite church. Paul was in prison, and not only was he in prison but every day of his life in prison, he thought that each day may be the last day of his life. You see, he was beheaded because he wouldn't renounce his faith. Paul was a condemned prisoner awaiting execution when he wrote these words. This wasn't some pie in the sky message from Paul because you don't mince words when your life is about to end.

Paul describes for us what a life of God's *Whatever* should be like. He basically calls us to stand firm and rejoice, to be gentle and to give thanks. And to do all this so you can experience the peace of God which passes all understanding. And then he says; this peace will guard your heart and your mind in Christ. How are we supposed to do this? Through one simple thing: ***Staying Focused***. That's partly what this passage is all about. It's a prescription for how to pray, for how to think, and what to reflect and meditate on in prayer. ***Paul's words are a prescription on how to Stay Focused on God's Whats.***

The first thing we have to focus are our hearts minds. A lot of us have grown up with poor self- esteem, perhaps we weren't part of the in crowd. Perhaps our idea of our self-worth was influenced too much by advertising, television and the whole pop culture media. The truth is we can't ever live up to pop culture because it changes so quickly and what is today's craze becomes tomorrow's embarrassment. Pop culture and the image of what is in and cool and perfect changes nearly as fast as computer technology. That's why Paul says *rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say rejoice.* God is constant and He doesn't change like the seasons. We can never fall out of fashion with God. *Rejoice in the Lord always.* Somehow that discipline of *always* seems to allude us at times. And yet, I believe that the *always* attitude is as much a spiritual discipline as Prayer, Bible Study, fasting, tithing and worship. It's an attitude that has to begin with centring ourselves in our relationship with God.

So the How of what Paul is teaching is focussed prayer. When I was training for ministry I learned a very simple technique called Affirmational Prayer. It's a simple prayer that I try to start my day with. *Lord through Your Son Jesus, You love me, once a sinner and now a saint, forgiven and saved by grace. And because You love me, I can love myself unconditionally.*"

Let's pray this prayer three times, quietly to ourselves. Each time pausing to image it, or imagine what those words feel like in your mind and heart and very spirit. Linger on that thought, on how you feel when you let the words penetrate your hearts and minds. Then pray again and imagine it again, and then you do it a third time. With that image of yourself and your relationship with God, your heart and your mind and your spirit are focused. And you can live in the *always* attitude to *God's Whatever*.

Most Eastern religions use meditation to stay focused by emptying the mind of all distractions. Paul tells us not to empty the mind because the devil can get into our heads then, but we are to fill our minds with *God's Whatever*. Let's remind ourselves of those *whatevers*: *Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* These are *God's Whatevers*.

Let me give you an example of those things that are true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise.

[Show Clip: Angel Flights]

There's a group of people whose hearts and minds are focused. I'm sure at times they too have trouble keeping the *always* attitude of *God's Whatever*. But their selfless act of flying families of children in need of medical attention to their treatments and doctor's appointments exemplifies *God's Whatever* being lived out in their lives. In our cynical world we rarely see such acts of selfless giving, and these pilots to care enough to spend money taking sick children to hospital, exemplify their *always* attitude to God.

When we focus on only on ourselves, life can get pretty hopeless, especially when we compare ourselves with the moving target of public opinion and worldly values. But when we focus our attitude and remember that we belong to God, we can move from the worlds *whatever, couldn't care less* attitude to the *always* attitude of *God's Whatever*.

Just like Paul, I'm not here to sell you a pie in the sky belief, and I can't promise you that the *always* attitude of *God's Whatever* or the *Affirmational Prayer* I shared with you, or reaching out through service to others will end all your negative thoughts. But know this, Christ didn't die on the cross so you would still be burdened by a load of guilt or a load of negative lies in your life. Christ died on the so you could be set free from all of that. Paul is simply telling us to focus on the cross and what Jesus did for us.

According to psychologists, the average person has more than two hundred negative thoughts a day: Worries, jealousies, insecurities, cravings, etc. We can't eliminate all the troublesome things that go through our minds, but we can reduce the number of negative thoughts by changing our focus to *Whatever* is true, *whatever* is honourable, *whatever* is just, *whatever* is pure, *whatever* is pleasing, *whatever* is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. **Amen.**

Let us sing of these attributes that Paul has called us to: MP 960 - *Whatever* is true.

(1423 words)