

When Our Chains and Blisters Provide Us Clear Opportunities to Share Jesus

In January 1962, a music teacher named Frane Selak was traveling by rail through a windswept gorge when the train flipped off its tracks and crashed into an icy river. Selak was pulled to safety, suffering hypothermia and a broken arm, but 17 people drowned.

The next year Selak went for his first (and last) plane ride. As both engines failed, the door malfunctioned, and he was blown out and landed in a haystack as the plane crashed, killing another 19 people. Between 1970 and 1973, two of his cars caught fire and nearly exploded. Once again, Selak suffered minor injuries.

And then what do you know? Frane Selak won the Croatian lottery and pocketed the equivalent of over a million American dollars. He's been called the luckiest—and the unluckiest—man on earth.

Well, I don't believe in luck, for all our circumstances are foreknown by God. But there's no doubt we have a wide mixture of things happening to us. We might not all be narrowly escaping plane crashes, trucking accidents or car fires like Selak. Some of us may be wondering when our children will be able to return to school, or from where our next paycheck may come. Wherever we are, God is near.

How, then, do we keep our focus on the positive and maintain the attitude of rejoicing, hope and faith that God expects?

There's a wonderful passage in Colossians 4 that contains some helpful insights. The apostle Paul was chained, and I suspect his chains were causing blisters. He had limited movement, and

his aged skin suffered from the rough heavy metal, from which there was no escape.

Paul, however, didn't focus on his chains. He merely mentioned them in a casual way as he gave this set of instructions to the Colossians in verses 2-4 (NKJV):

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak."

Continue Earnestly in Prayer

As so many of us are, Paul was chained to a particular circumstance that he could not control.

From his experience, we can draw four principles about how we handle life. First, we handle it with prayer, which enables us to process our problems and burdens in God's presence. When we pray, we're approaching God through an open veil and communing with Him friend to friend.

Had Paul been unable to pray, he would have been distracted by the blisters his chains caused. Because he could process them in prayer before the Lord, they merit only a brief mention.

Approach Each Hour with a Penchant for Thanksgiving

The passage continues: "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). This isn't the only time in Colossians that Paul brings up thanksgiving. That subject runs through the book of Colossians the way joy runs through the book of Philippians.

Why is that?

Perhaps Paul had felt discouraged in his chains, so he recommitted himself to being thankful and to notice the

blessings instead of the blisters. That attitude seeped into his writings. He used the words “thanks” or “thanksgiving” at least once in every chapter.

We, too, have to watch our attitudes, for it’s easy to become negative and focus on the blisters of life. We need to train ourselves to use the word “thanks” or “thanksgiving” at least once every hour.

For parents whose children are unable to attend school in-person, maybe you can find appreciation for the opportunity to spend more time with them. For those who find the state of our political climate provoking anxiety, take this time to thank the Lord for allowing us to worship Him freely. Find something right now within your range of vision for which you can say, “Lord, thank you!”

Look for Open Doors for Leveraging Your Situation for Christ

The third way to minimize focusing on your own chains and the blisters they cause is to look for open doors to leverage every situation for Christ. Notice Paul’s prayer request that God would open a door for the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ, “for which I am also in chains” (Col. 4:3).

Paul’s focus wasn’t on himself or his own problems. He wasn’t a self-obsessed victim. He was asking, “How can I find some open doors, even in the midst of these chains? I must ask God to show me some new opportunities to minister for Him.”

When we’re serving Christ by helping others, it leaves less time for self-obsession, and often the very blisters that are bothering us can become blessings for others.

Speak the Gospel as Clearly as You Can

In the process, you’ll want to be alert to sharing the gospel as clearly as possible. Paul concluded in verses 3-4, “meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a

door for the word ... that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.”

In other words, he asked the Colossians to pray he would always be able to present the gospel clearly. We never know when our chains and our blisters will provide us with an opportunity to clearly share the Gospel of Christ. Perhaps the more painful spots in our lives will yield the greatest harvest for the kingdom as time goes by.

The gathering restrictions and travel complications we have become accustomed to fit directly into the blister category, yet sometimes they provide unexpected opportunities for us to make the gospel clear to others, as we ought to do.

Don't remain self-obsessed if you're chained to some unavoidable situation that is rubbing blisters on your skin. Change your focus. Look past the social distancing and school closures to the impact you can make in someone else's life, and see the blessings instead of the blisters. Pray earnestly, and process your situations through prayer; approach each hour with a penchant for thanksgiving; look for opportunities to use your painful places as opportunities of ministry; and speak the Gospel as clearly as you can.

That's a formula for being blessed beyond measure. {eo}

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