

Good morning everyone and welcome again to Cornerstone Christian Church. For those who don't know me, my name is Peter. My wife Jayne and I have had the pleasure of calling this church home for quite a while.

Over the last couple of weeks pastors Kate and Guy have provided insight and tools to help us in our individual walks with Jesus. Pastor Kate described the trap we often fall into in our thoughts and our words by the accusatory use of the words 'Always' and 'Never'. Pastor Guy talked about the ways we can react to the 'Bitter' and 'Sweet' experiences of our lives. Both messages are timely reminders for us all, and if you missed them or want to hear them again, they are posted on the church website.

This morning I want to talk about our attitude. The attitude we embrace can be formed and fed by the words we speak. If "ALWAYS" or "NEVER" are used in a healthy way: "My God will ALWAYS be by my side", then a healthy attitude will tend to develop. If they are used in an unhealthy way: "God NEVER speaks to me", we are tempted down the path of despondancy and defeat.

Our responses to life events are usually driven by our attitude. If our attitude is despondant, then a BITTER experience will re-enforce that attitude and increase our feelings of despair. However if our attitude is positive then we will be able to discern the blessing that often comes with, or because of, or sometimes despite that same BITTER experience.

So how do we gain a healthy attitude? Here are some hints.

1. Remind ourselves constantly about Gods promises to us. Promises like:-
 - "I will never leave you or forsake you. The Lord is my helper, and I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Heb 13:5 & 6.
 - "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Fathers care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" Matt 10:29-30 & Lk 12:7.
 - "If God is for us, who can be against us? Rom 8:31.
 - "Many, Lord my God, are the wonders you have done, the things you planned for us. None can compare with you; were I to speak and tell of your deeds, they would be too many to declare." Ps 40:5.
 - "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God." Rom 5:1-2.

I have no doubt most of us will have many more examples of Gods promises to us. It is said there is a blessing on every page of the Bible. I rather think that might be a bit of an understatement!

2. The second hint is to remind ourselves of the times when a promise of God has become specifically evident to us. An example that is very significant and special to me is found in Jer 45:5 and it says, "Should you then seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them. For I will bring disaster on all people" declares the LORD, "but wherever you go I will let you escape with your life."

I wasn't seeking great things, but I was facing a life threatening situation, and this verse cropped up pretty much every time that I opened a Bible, for a period of several months.

The first hint requires discipline and training. Discipline to seek out the promises, and training to learn how to apply them to specific events. We have to commit these verses to memory, and keep alert to Gods voice as He prompts you to specific passages of scripture.

The second hint requires awareness as well as discipline. Awareness is required to discern when the written word becomes a spoken, or Rhema word. By this I mean the word becomes alive for you for now. When Jeremiah 45 first turned up for me, I was reading Jeremiah as part of my daily devotion, and I didn't recognise it as anything important. But when it turned up day after day in various bibles and circumstances, and as the situation I was facing developed, the significance slowly started to sink home. In similar experiences through my Christian walk, one or more of Gods promises comes back to me depending on the circumstance I find myself. There are also other tools available to us such as regular Bible reading, meditation on His word both written and spoken, thinking and speaking well of other people, refusing to engage in gossip or put-downs, extending forgiveness to those who harm us, asking forgiveness for offences we may have made. There are many more, some easier and some more difficult, but there is one tool I have found which is easy, and pleasant, and very effective. I learned this one while I was going through the life event I mentioned earlier.

- Prov 17:22 tells us that "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Prov 15:13 and 15:5 provide variations of the same theme.

There is one potential pit-fall with this tool. A cheerful heart can look to others like a frivolous, happy go-lucky, couldn't care less heart. **It is not.** It is choosing to look for the bright side in every situation. And if something good cannot be found, then it is the time to delve into your "Kete o te Atua kupu whakaari" your basket of Gods promises. It is associated with the Christian definition of hope, a hope based on a full assurance rooted in faith, in contrast to the worldly wishful thinking type of hope that something good might happen. This Christian hope is outworked by living life in response to Gods promise to all who believe in Him, not in response to the empty promises and threats of this temporal world which we are visiting. It is speaking well of others. It is living the way Pastors Kate and Guy outlined in their recent messages.

This way of living is something that, without Gods help, we could emulate for a while. But eventually the mask will slip. Sometimes it slips even with Gods help, which is where a healthy dose of humility is required. The only way to maintain this lifestyle is to be grounded in Gods love. And the best way to do that is to stay in communion with Him and with His other children. This is one of the reasons why we have a shared lunch next week. It is also why we share a meal with Jesus every week.

In the Holy Communion emblems which we will soon share there is a subtle lesson. The first emblem is a very small piece of bread, and the second is a tiny amount of grape juice. There is no way our lives with Jesus are ever going to survive on such a pittance of nourishment. Holy Communion grew out of the Jewish Passover celebration which was and is a full festival meal, and it needs to continue as a full meal of communion with our Lord and with each other throughout the week with generous servings of prayer, worship, praise, study, service and humility.