

Philippians 2 v 14-15

<sup>14</sup> Do everything without complaining and arguing, <sup>15</sup> so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.

Good evening.

Although I like to hear meditations, it's the first time that I've presented one myself. So where should I start?

It seemed a good idea to get the bible passage first so I contacted Kat. The answer - just choose a passage yourself, did not in the first instance seem very helpful. Tuesday came and I started flicking through the 2199 pages of my study bible. This was clearly not going to be useful.

So I prayed about what I should do. The first thoughts that cropped up in my mind were , you're a teacher, you've got countless assembly books, look at them, and secondly go from where you are at the moment.

The first passage that caught my eye in an assembly book was a poem about a poor boy named Alfred Dumble who couldn't do anything but grumble. The bible reference was Philippians 2 v 14 -15. This linked well to a book I have recently read about the power of positive thought. Things were looking up – I seemed to have a place to start!

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How easy verse fourteen sounds to be for some people. People like me have a lot to be happy about! A wonderful husband, supportive family, a place to live, great friends, not to mention Peace Church and being a member of God's family forever. My list could be so much longer.

But do I complain? The answer has to be yes. Often it's just little things, a bit of negativity here or a doubt there. I don't think of myself as a big complainer.

But internally?

Do I moan in my mind?

This answer is also yes. Sometimes my negative thoughts can be quite difficult. I like things to go in the way I want and when they don't well..... I complain inwardly! I can be rather self-centred!

I'm a person who has been blessed in many ways. I sometimes wonder how people in different circumstances manage. Why don't they complain and argue continually. People who perhaps have an abusive partner, no money, no where to live, estranged family, health issues and friends who come and go. How easy in this situation to sink into a hole and complain and argue constantly.

The striking thing to me is that some people in this second group are actually the most positive, friendly and caring people around. So how is this? Why aren't they always complaining? It's often justified. How do they seem to be able to see things in a different way?

Perhaps it's to do with God's love? When we accept God's huge, extravagant love for ourselves, loving ourself and then loving our neighbour becomes easier. Love is very powerful.

With God's love in us it becomes easier to love the people we complain about and argue with. People who we may find difficult, demanding or irritable. With God's love in us it can overflow into other people.

Love for everyone is important. It is powerful. However it requires effort and prayer to sustain it over time. God is showering us with love day in, day out but we need to be aware and notice it, in difficult times as well as when life is easier. Accepting God's love means that instead of criticising, complaining about and arguing with people, we learn to love them.

So how do we show that love and shine like bright lights?

Love is powerful and words are too. Nico's meditation three weeks ago described perfectly how we can use them both positively and negatively. Words are everywhere. They're in books, on the internet, on TV, in the newspapers, in our thoughts and on social media and that's before we start to think about just talking to people. Words can uplift people or completely shatter their confidence.

We all know people who use positive, uplifting, celebratory and thankful language. When this is used together with a smile, God's love begins to shine through. It's not easy and there are going to be times it feels impossible. But God's love is always there for us and with it, we can begin to shine. With God's love in us, we can begin to change our entire focus on life.

At the beginning of this meditation I described a poem about Alfred Dumble, a man who would always grumble. Well for most of the poem he walked around with his own personal rain cloud above his head and thunder making his hair stand on end. However at the end he'd learnt not to complain and the thunder cloud was replaced with a shining star!

God encourages us not to be self centred, not to complain and argue but to love and shine like bright lights in the world around us.

As children of God and let's remember Paul's words this week and try not to complain but to walk in the thankfulness and love of God.