

Paraklēsis: Context

Have you ever been in a situation that was undesirable, boring, frustrating, or difficult? Yeah, I thought so. Me too. It's part of life – comes with the territory. But, there's a way to hack those experiences. How you perceive the situation from the outside will determine your level of satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, while muscling through the task. Your ability to choose whether or not to do the task may not exist; it is something that you just have to do. But **the context under which you operate is a choice that you can make.**

A friend of mine was applying for a grant for his organization. This was the first time he had done so, and while filling out the application he was complaining to himself about the whole process. The grantor wanted to know everything about the project and in such detail. What a painful experience. During subsequent applications for grants, he realized that the people asking for this detailed information were actually giving money away... and that they needed to make sure the applicant was worthy of receiving the money. This money was going to be used by my friend to fund a project that would make the world a better place. Filling out the application was a small, necessary task that would hopefully enable him to accomplish his goal. He **realized the context that he was working under** – the “Why” – and now he fills out grant applications with much less dread and frustration.

Consider this scripture with respect to context...

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. (Galatians 5:18)

I believe that Paul is telling us to view our physical, daily walk here on earth in the context of being Spirit led – continually. If we are living our lives from the context of God's Holy Spirit, we won't be concerned and fretting about obeying the law. Living in that context, our actions would be completely in sync with God's will. **The Spirit will not lead one to transgress the law.**

*But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that **law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious**, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. (1 Timothy 1:8-11)*

I remember a couple of years ago or so, when I was 26... God tapped me on the shoulder and showed me enough of His Truth so that I believed. At the time, I was fully immersed in and enjoying as much as I could, whatever the world had to offer. I was not living a healthy lifestyle. Even though God had shown me some pretty amazing things, **I was still trying to make the decision to follow Him**, or not. As you might imagine, my battle was founded in the contexts that I chose to view the decision from. I initially viewed the decision from the context of “all of the fun that I would need to give up.” Something in my being cringed at and fought against this idea. I refused to change my lifestyle such that all fun would come to an end. Where would the quality of life come from? **My life would surely be boring.** Thankfully, I considered something I had observed in others and applied that context to my situation. The observation (that literally saved me...) was that many other people I knew of had made the commitment to follow God, and they were happy! They did not consider their lives to be deathly boring. I knew that they were living joyful, satisfied lives, and if I made that commitment, I should also be able to. (And it turned out to be true!)

One of my spiritual mentors has a saying that pricks this concept of adopting a beneficial context in life. He says in certain situations, “**I don’t HAVE to, I GET to...**” In other words, count it all joy.

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, **lacking in nothing.** (James 1:2-4)*

The admonition here – for all of us – is to change the context of our operations to align with that of our Father’s. Consider the context in the scripture below... The mom-to-be is faced with the inevitability of very real and excruciating pain. This is never something that anyone would look forward to with pleasurable, joyous anticipation. But, in spite of the real pain, there is real anticipation, there is real joy. **Context can change everything.**

*"Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. "Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. "Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and **no one will take your joy away from you.** "In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. (John 16:20-24)*

When you change your context so that you trust in God and He becomes your salvation, the promise of joy can be fulfilled:

Therefore you will joyously draw water From the springs of salvation. (Isaiah 12:3)

There are many scriptural examples of people changing their context toward God’s will. Paul’s conversion away from persecuting believers, Jonah eventually making it to Nineveh, Job realizing God’s sovereignty...

Imagine the context that Paul was operating under when he was singing in prison. **We should always carry such a context of joy and praise.**

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; (Acts 16:25)

Consider the answer you give to folks when they ask, “So, what do you do?” Your answer tells them the context under which you operate. Typically for me, my answer is my job – and, of course, that is the expected answer and the essence of the question. **But, is that what defines you?** Is that the best description of what you do?

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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