**Series: God Bent Down to Lift Us Up**

**Finding Joy When Your Career is in a Downward Spiral,**

**John 3:22-36** May 29, 2016

Richard Stolley’s rules for a successful cover: Young is better than old. Pretty is better than ugly. Rich is better than poor. TV is better than music. Music is better than movies. Movies are better than sports. Anything is better than politics. And nothing is better than a celebrity who has just died.

* How do we maintain our sanity in a Richard Stolley world?

1. Frustration follows when winning, not excelling, becomes your goal. (John 3:22-26)

A. A spirit of competition breeds disdain

* V.26 They won’t even mention his name.
* Gracy Olmstead: … traditionally, the home was not a place to be despised. Being a housewife was not degrading, either: as the gardener, cook, cleaner, and housekeeper, a woman was vital to the health and sustenance of her entire household—as well as, often, the other families

B. A spirit of competition breeds deception

* V.26 … *look, he is baptizing*
* John 4:2 *… Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples*

C. A spirit of competition breeds exaggeration

* V.26 *… all are going to him*
* V.23 *John also was baptizing at Aenon*
* Christian Rudder: 40% of men on this dating site claim to be geniuses.
* Luke 9:46 *An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest.*

Q. Where are you tempted towards feelings of competition?

Q. What’s the difference between pursuing excellence and supremacy?

2. Joy results when God, not your advancement, becomes your focus. (John 3:27-30)

A. When you focus on God, you can see your job as a gift not a reward.

* V.27 *A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven*
* Mt 25:15 *To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.*
* 1 Corinthians 4:7 *… What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*

B. When you focus on God, you’re free to serve Jesus not your promotion.

* V.28 *You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’*
* Ask ‘How can I be more faithful?’ not ‘How can I get ahead?’
* William Law: If someone is leaving you behind, and you are becoming jealous and embittered, keep praying that he may have success in the very matter where he is awakening your envy; and whether he is helped or not, one thing is sure, that your own soul will be cleansed and ennobled.

C. When you focus on God, you can find your joy in Jesus not your accomplishments.

* V.29 *The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.*
* Toscanini: I am nothing. You are nothing. But Beethoven is everything.

Q. John states a profound truth in v.27. How would this truth have encouraged him as he saw his star fading?

Q. If we understand the truth of 1 Corinthians 4:7, how should we view our accomplishments?

Q. What do you think it means to serve Jesus in your career?

Q. What can we learn from v.29 about experiencing joy in loss?

3. Our response to competition and loss exposes the true nature of our faith. (John 3:31-36)

A. We can’t face loss with joy without heaven’s perspective

* V.31 *He who comes from above is above all.*
* Tim Keller: You listen to the traffic report because the guy in the helicopter can see the whole road and you can’t. His testimony comes from above.

B. By faith we affirm God’s evaluation of our lives and reject the world’s.

* V.33 *Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.*

C. It was a heart of competition that caused many to reject Jesus and call for His crucifixion.

* V.36 *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*
* James 3:14-15 *14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*

Q. Where do you most need to affirm God’s evaluation of your life?

Q. What is it about ambition that the world sees as almost entirely good?

Q. What is it about ambition that James 3:14-15 can call demonic?

Q. The Pharisees rejected Jesus largely because they saw Him as competition. In what sense can we be tempted to see Jesus as competition for the other passions in our life?

**Notes:**