



PHILIPPIANS: JOY FOR LIFE'S JOURNEY

FINDING OPPORTUNITIES IN PROBLEMS • PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26 • 5/1/2022

NOTES

This week we will be focused on 12-29 (3 extra verses). The main point will be Trusting God when life is not going the way you planned. Because you have this study almost a month before the sermon, it is likely the main points will not align exactly. However, while covering the same passage, the main thrust of the sermon and this lesson will coincide.

MAIN POINT

Paul demonstrated for believers three healthy perspectives toward problems.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is your default coping mechanism for dealing with a problem?

What is the best advice you have ever received while struggling through a particularly trying season in life?

Based on what you know about the apostle Paul, how would you describe his attitude toward and strategy for coping with difficult situations?

"Every cloud has a silver lining." "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." "Keep calm and carry on." "No pain, no gain." "It's always darkest before the dawn." We have devised various philosophical sayings to use as coping mechanisms when we face problem situations. Often it is easy for those outside the situation to spout off these time-tested bits of philosophy to those in the midst of the situation. It is, however, far more difficult to be caught up in one of those situations and adopt a trite, cute little proverb. We need something more substantial than tired, flippant adages to sustain us in those times—something like Paul's strategy for dealing with problems.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILIPPIANS 1:12-19.

Talk about a problem situation: Paul was in prison, probably in Rome, when he wrote this letter to the church at Philippi. Unlike modern times in this country, the prison system in that day did not provide meals. So despite being jailed, Paul would have still been responsible for securing his own meals or relying on others to provide for him.

Why was Paul in prison?

In addition to the general hardships of prison, what else was making Paul's situation worse?

How could Paul say that his situation had "actually advanced the gospel"? How could that be? What evidence did he offer to support that claim?

What do you make of Paul's conclusion in verse 18? Does God use every problem situation to see that Christ is proclaimed? What made the proclamation of Christ a reality in this instance?

Paul's priority on proclaiming the gospel did not depend on his personal comfort, pleasant circumstances, or the approval of others. Thus, Paul saw even difficult circumstances as opportunities for the advancement of the gospel.

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILIPPIANS 1:20.

Having expressed to the believers in Philippi that he did not care about his personal circumstances so long as Christ was proclaimed, Paul then expressed his overarching goal in life as two sides to the same coin (not this, but that). How would you express each aspect of Paul's goal in your own words?

The Greek verb translated "be ashamed" comes from a root that originally meant to be disfigured, then came to mean to be dishonored or ashamed. What additional insight does the word's background give you into understanding Paul's goal?

Paul used words such as "eager expectation and hope," "now as always," and "by life or by death" to express his goal that Christ would be "highly honored in my body." What do these expressions tell you about his attitude toward his situation?

What lessons do you see in this verse for how to approach problems in your life?

Paul's goal in life was to honor Christ, not just a little but "highly." Anything less than that would cause him to "be ashamed." As with proclaiming the gospel, Paul recognized that his opportunity to honor Christ was not hampered by the details and circumstances whirling about him, but by his own "expectation and hope."

| ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PHILIPPIANS 1:21-26.

What dilemma did Paul lay out in these verses? How was it a very relative dilemma for Paul?

Why was Paul "torn between the two"?

What did Paul identify as the advantage or appeal of each possible outcome of his dilemma?

Many times when believers find themselves in difficult situations, they find themselves wishing the situation would just go away, or they play the "what if?" game—what if I'd done this differently? What if I hadn't done that? What if ...? But Paul didn't ask "what if?" He looked at both possibilities and saw how God could use either. Should Rome take his life, it would ultimately be to his advantage as he would "depart and be with Christ," an option he saw as "far better." On the other hand, if Rome didn't take his life, he would continue to strengthen other believers. He looked at his difficult situation and saw a win-win opportunity, whatever the outcome.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What about your approach to problems might need to change in order for Christ to be proclaimed through them?

What would it look like for you to address any current problem "with all courage"? How might that serve to honor Christ? What would be required for Christ to be honored by your approach to a difficult situation?

Many people, believers included, tend to only see the possible "bad" outcomes of a problem. Like Paul, how can you learn to recognize the advantage or appeal of even a "bad" outcome?

PRAYER

Pray for God to give group participants eyes to see problems as opportunities for God to continue to do through them what He desired and designed to do all along. Ask that in all aspects of life, believers might honor Christ “with all courage.”

COMMENTARY

| PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26

1:12. Paul points to his own persecution and his present imprisonment in Rome. Instead of hampering the gospel, these have advanced it. Paul appears to be reassuring the Philippians that even though his movements are restricted, mere human constraints cannot thwart the gospel.

1:13. Paul’s imprisonment was not due to committing any crime. He was in chains for Christ. The whole palace guard along with the common people on the street understood that he was in prison due to his commitment to the cause of Christ.

1:14. With Paul not having the freedom to minister where he pleased, other believers had taken the baton or come up to the plate to speak the word of God in Paul’s stead. Conventional or worldly wisdom would think the threat of jail would make Christians fearful of proclaiming their faith. Yet the opposite was true. God saw fit to use what looked to be a setback to gain new converts.

1:15. Paul’s difficulties spawned missionary zeal based on two types of motives: selfishness and goodwill. Seizing the opportunity of the moment, some envied the success God had given Paul, while others wanted to be a part of what God was doing through Paul. Both gave people the good news of Christ’s gospel.

1:16. Motivated by Paul’s example, those who preach with right motives do so in love. Such love flows out to Paul, to unbelievers needing the gospel, and to God. Such love realizes that Paul was suffering, not for some wrong he had done, but because he preached Christ (see vv. 12–13).

1:17. Those with wrong motives seek to exalt themselves. They do not promote the gospel in sincerity. Rather they seek to further their own selfish ambitions and to stir up trouble for Paul. They hoped Paul would think they had taken over his place and so would be disheartened.

1:18. Some Christians wanted to harm the messenger, Paul. Yet he was not concerned for himself. He focused strictly on the message. Even though the gospel was being proclaimed with mixed motives, the message, nevertheless, was Christ. Even wrong motives could result in actions that let people come to know Jesus. So Paul emphasized the results, not the reasons, and rejoiced.

1:19. Paul was detained; but the gospel was still going forth, so Paul remained encouraged. He had faith something good would happen to him. Why? Because the Philippians prayed and the Spirit of Jesus Christ remained at work. So Paul looked expectantly to the day he would leave prison but at the same time comprehended that he could be executed.

1:20. Whether he regained his freedom to minister outside of prison or went to be with the Lord in heaven, he did not want to be ashamed of his testimony for Christ. Whatever took place, he desired for Christ to be exalted in his body. What was required to avoid shame and ensure exaltation of Christ? Courage! The internal strength to live for Christ or die for Christ, whichever was required. Only such courageous living exalts Christ.

1:21. Many people believe this verse is the most important of the entire book. It demonstrates that Christ is the source of meaning for Paul. He announced: to live is Christ. In death the adversities of this life would be over, and he would be with Christ in heaven. Therefore, to die is gain.

1:22–24. Paul conveys the dilemma of his situation. The apostle was so committed to the cause of Christ that staying on earth had its advantages but so did departing and going to heaven. To live means fruitful labor. He could remain ministering and spreading the gospel. To die means eternity with Christ. Given a choice in the matter, Paul did not know his decision.

Being with Christ appeals to him. It would certainly be an improvement in his present circumstances. Yet he places the needs of his readers ahead of his desire. Staying lets them benefit from his ministry.

1:25–26. Paul knew Christ's mind, a mind that put the needs of others above personal desires, so Paul knew he would remain on earth to minister to the churches. Paul considered the welfare of fellow Christians more important than his desire to go to heaven. By enduring on earth, he could assist their spiritual growth and joy in the Christian faith. This joy is not from circumstances but from a relationship in Christ Jesus, the source of true joy for believers.