

PHILIPPIANS—WEEK 2
The furtherance of the Gospel: Phil. 1:12-26

Last week we began our study of the book of Philippians by discussing the fellowship of the Gospel. We discussed how through the transforming power of grace and peace, the Church was a beacon of fellowship that transcended race, nationality, social status, or circumstances. Rooted in the transforming power of the gospel, the Church was to bring back together what had been divided, and it was to do so by being the living embodiment of love in action. However, as Paul goes on to explain in Chapter 1, this fellowship rooted in grace and peace is not the end of the story—it is merely the beginning.

At the time Paul was writing this epistle, he was not in what any of us would consider enviable circumstances, and his condition had been a dire one for quite some time. He had been arrested in Jerusalem and put on trial. Rather than subject himself to a trial rigged by Jewish officials, Paul had appealed to Caesar, which meant he was to be transported as a prisoner to Rome. Along the way, he had been shipwrecked and nearly lost at sea. Upon safely reaching the shore, he was promptly bitten by a venomous snake while gathering firewood. Once he was rescued, he was transported to Rome, where he was placed under house arrest, which meant he was chained to Roman soldiers 24 hours a day while Roman officials determined his fate. It would have been perfectly natural for Paul to be depressed by his circumstances. Yet, we find Paul far from depressed. In fact, we find him full of joy and expectant hope. How was Paul able to maintain such an attitude in such difficult circumstances?

Paul was rooted in the fellowship of the Gospel, which gave him the courage and strength to be singularly focused on the furtherance of the Gospel. Paul viewed his circumstances not as a crisis but as an opportunity. The four guards to whom he was chained each day were not his oppressors; they were lost souls God had given Paul to win. The Roman officials in Caesar's household determining Paul's fate were not his judges; they were his mission field. Paul understood that the men and women with whom he now had the opportunity to share were men and women of influence, men and women who otherwise might never have heard the good news of salvation absent Paul's imprisonment. As long as the Gospel was being advanced, Paul was content no matter what circumstance he faced. Stripped of everything, under attack from even those who claimed to be Christians, Paul found peace and purpose in making Christ his everything. Christ was truly his reason for living.

So often we try to pray ourselves out of difficulties instead of praying ourselves through them. We are so anxious to be removed from a difficult situation that we fail to see how God could be using that circumstance for our good and His glory. We become so focused on our suffering that we fail to see the opportunities that suffering affords us. I know that I am guilty of doing everything in my power to NOT talk to anyone else when I'm in the waiting room of a doctor's office. What would life be like if instead I approached that situation anxiously anticipating the soul God was bringing to me to minister to that day? Oh, that we would be a church that looks not at our circumstances but at our opportunities!

Questions:

1. Look at verse 21 as a group. What does Paul mean when he says to live is Christ and to die is gain?
2. Think of a time when you experienced a difficulty or crisis. What was your focus? Were there opportunities you found in that circumstance to be a witness for Christ? Looking back, were there opportunities you missed to be a witness for Christ?
3. Are there circumstances you find yourself in today (good, bad, or neutral) that provide you with a unique opportunity to share the Gospel with someone who is lost? How can you leverage your life for the Gospel?