

Week 2: Boldness in Difficulty *Philippians 1:12-18*

Hook



Main Point: We can advance the Gospel through suffering.

All of us have motivations behind what we do. When life gets difficult, your motivation behind what you do becomes much clearer. We may think our motivations are not important in every aspect of life, but they are. Especially in ministry. In ministry, your motivation can make all the difference.

Break into groups of three or four to discuss the most difficult job any of them have ever had. Ask them to identify:

- Their *motives* for starting that job, staying in that job, and leaving that job.
- What good things came out of the difficulties (did it help them to grow, teach them something new, build a new friendship, help them to see what they were **not** looking for in their next job, etc.)?

After a few minutes, bring them back together to discuss some highlights and further questions.

Please share some of the good things that came out of the difficulties.

How did your motives affect the way you did your job?

Looking back, what would have been some better motives?

How might our motives impact the way we approach ministry and the Church?

Week 2, Philippians 1:12-18

Book

Main Point: We can advance the Gospel through suffering.

Text Summary: Paul seeks to encourage his Philippian partners that his suffering is not in vain. God has ordained it for the advancing of the Gospel. His imprisonment gave him the opportunity to share the Gospel with Roman elites and emboldened fellow believers to be witnesses as well. Apparently, many people even heard about the Gospel and came to visit him in prison to hear more about it. Although some preachers did ministry out of selfish ambition, many did so out of love. Either way, no matter their motivation, Paul rejoices that the Gospel is being proclaimed.

Philippians 1:12-14 [Read]

Sub-Point 1: God has a purpose in Paul's suffering.

We all know positive people, who always put a positive spin on everything. "I lost my job, but that must just mean an even better one is around the corner!" Or "I've got the flu, but that just means more time to catch up on binge-watching Netflix!" But Paul's attitude in these verses – rejoicing in his imprisonment because it advances the Gospel – that's a pretty extreme positive perspective (v. 12).

If you were in prison for two years for your faith, such as Paul, what kind of attitude might you have?

What does Paul's attitude say about what matters to him?

Paul was writing this letter from Rome, where he was living under house arrest. In this kind of imprisonment, he had to provide for his own needs financially – pay rent for the house he was being imprisoned in and for his own food and supplies (Acts 28:30). Yet he wasn't able to continue his "day job" of tent making, so many of his churches sent money and provisions. As we learned last week, the Philippians were one of the churches that supported him. So, he was partly writing to thank them, and to let them know their money was being put to good use. But he was also encouraging them by saying that not only was he OK, but that God was using him, even in prison.

This imprisonment had created a whole new ministry for him. He was able to witness to people he otherwise wouldn't have had access to – the royal guard, an elite and specialized group of soldiers who typically guarded prominent Roman officials (v. 13).ⁱ During his imprisonment, he was also given freedom by those guards to allow visitors from all over Rome to come to him. Paul was there for two years awaiting trial. But, through the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, throughout those two years, the book of Acts says:

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! (Acts 28:30-31)

This is actually the last verse of the book of Acts, how the story ends. When you read Acts, it feels like an abrupt ending; we want to know more of the story of what happened to Paul. But the conclusion of Acts brings into focus that even though Paul was in prison, the Gospel is being advanced. Paul spoke with boldness and without hindrance. Though Paul had guards and chains keeping his *body* contained, his message advanced *without hindrance!*

Paul is making the same point here in our passage. He rejoices in his suffering because through his suffering, the Gospel is being advanced. This is a person who is more focused on his mission than on himself, his own comfort, his own life.

Have you ever known someone in your life or read about someone who endures great suffering with an attitude like Paul? That if it advances God's mission, that person will suffer willingly? Joyfully, even?

What does a life like that say to the world about the Gospel?

Besides the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, the key to Paul's rejoicing in his suffering here is his motivation, his attitude. What others would see as an obstacle; Paul saw as an opportunity.

Those chains weren't an obstacle to the Gospel, they were an opportunity to preach to a whole new group of people who otherwise may never have heard the Gospel. This is not mentioned here in Philippians, but Acts tells us that Paul had even had an opportunity to heal and witness to an entire island full of people when they were shipwrecked while he was being transferred to Rome to be imprisoned (Acts 28). An island of people who may have never heard the Gospel otherwise. So, even in chains and shipwrecked, God was using him for the advancement of the Gospel! Paul even saw his trial before King Agrippa as a chance to proclaim the Gospel to him

(Acts 26)! As God had predicted to Ananias, “*He will be my instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles **and to their kings***” (Acts 9:15).

Paul saw everything in his life, good or bad, as an opportunity to share the Gospel. The key was his attitude, his motivation in life.

Some of God’s greatest instruments have been marked by suffering. Jesus, obviously. But He also said His disciples would have trouble in this world (John 16:33) and that the world hates them (John 15:18-25). And yet, He says to them:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:10-12)

Paul did not view suffering as meaningless or as proof that God had abandoned him. Rather, he saw suffering as an opportunity. And a tool that molded endurance and faith in us (Romans 5:3-5). When our motivation is focused on advancing the Gospel more than our own comfort or ease, we, like Paul, can see obstacles as opportunities. It’s all in our attitude.

Have you ever seen someone using his or her suffering as an opportunity to share the Gospel? How did that work out for the person?

How can you reframe your thinking, to see your obstacles as opportunities for mission?

Paul was able to turn his obstacle into opportunity because of his boldness. And he called others to be bold in sharing the Gospel (v. 14) One of the other positives of his imprisonment, besides being able to witness to a wider audience, is that it emboldened others to preach the Gospel—a direct result of his less-than-enviable incarceration. As one commentator put it: “Paul’s confinement was doing what his circumstances outside of prison could never do.”¹

How would Paul’s imprisonment give other believers more confidence to preach with boldness?

¹ Robert P. Lightner, “[Philippians](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 651.

Who has helped you build your faith through his or her faithful endurance?

How can we encourage each other to be bold in sharing our faith?

What is one way you could be bold in sharing the Gospel with someone this week?

Philippians 1:15-18 [Read]

Sub-Point 2: Even if someone has bad motives, rejoice because the Gospel is still preached.

In verses 15-18, Paul is expounding upon these people who have been emboldened by his imprisonment to preach the Gospel. He separates them into two categories: those who do it out of rivalry and those who do it out of love.

What does he say about each group of people? How does he describe them?

The word for rivalry here means “creating strife or quarreling, stirring up trouble.” Paul uses the word in his “sin lists” elsewhere to say that people who act that way have hearts focused on the flesh rather than the Spirit. The words “envy and rivalry” also suggest a relationship that has gone wrong; Paul said that these preachers proclaimed Christ out of selfish ambition – to make themselves look good or to gain power or money or fame for themselves.² But also, specifically, that they did it “to afflict me in my imprisonment” (v. 17). Perhaps these individuals hoped Rome would punish Paul or finally rid the church of him.³ Whatever the case, the situation was personal and hurtful.

Paul’s response to these rivals was admirable and fitting with his focus on the mission, with his motivation for everything. He said, “As long as Christ is preached, I rejoice” (v. 18). Paul did not present a defense to defend his reputation, retaliate with a counterattack or call for an end to his affliction. Those concerns are eclipsed by the mission. All that matters is that Christ is preached. All that matters is the advancement of the Gospel.

Paul doesn’t use the Gospel as a platform for his own glory. He doesn’t put others down in order to lift himself up. He doesn’t react when goaded by people, doesn’t sink to their level, he

² Richard R. Melick, [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 74.

³ Richard R. Melick, [*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 74.

doesn't play that game. Those who preached out of love knew that Paul was in prison to defend the Gospel (v. 16), that his motivations were pure and his commitment to the mission was enduring. It didn't matter what his rivals said, those who loved him knew the truth.

How can we keep our own motives in check? Make sure we are doing all that we do for the advancement of the Gospel and not our own glory?

How can we be sure not to have a spirit of competition with other churches in our area? Any kind of envy or rivalry?

How can we work together with those churches for the advancement of the Gospel?

Sub-Point 3: God can use anyone for the advancement of the Gospel.

God can use anyone for the advancement of His Gospel. The example everyone always likes to use is, "God can use a donkey to speak His Word; He can use anyone." Of course, the reference is to the story of Balak and Balaam in Numbers 22-24. Balak, king of Moab, tried to pay the prophet Balaam to curse the nation of Israel so he could beat them in battle. Balaam said he would go, but he could only speak what God told him to speak, and he ended up blessing them instead, three times. On the way to meet with the princes of Moab, an angel appeared that Balaam couldn't see but the donkey could. And the Lord opened the mouth of the donkey to speak to Balaam.

God spoke through a donkey. He spoke through a burning bush, a thunderstorm, and a whisper (Exodus 3; Exodus 20; 1 Kings 19). He spoke through dreams and visions. God spoke through Moses, who said he wasn't a good speaker. (Scholars debate over whether he actually had a stuttering problem or just didn't feel comfortable with public speaking.) God spoke through Jeremiah even though he said he was too young. He spoke through Peter who was just an uneducated fisherman. And here, Paul says that God can even speak through people who are preaching with the wrong motives.

God has a plan, and He is in control. He's using all kinds of people to accomplish that plan—maybe some that you think aren't doing things the way you would do them or even doing them with the wrong motives. There are going to be people in our world who do that, who take advantage of the Gospel for their own glory, money or fame.

That is truly sad for them, because although God can use anyone, it is not good for the spiritual maturity of the person who is like that. The Bible says God will hold that person accountable for

the kind of ministry they built and what kind of materials they used to build it. In Corinthians, Paul uses the metaphor that we are all building a building. The foundation is Christ, but our life's ministry is the building; we build on top of that foundation. At the Judgment Day, in the refining fire, ministries that were built with wood, hay and straw will be burned up, but those built with gold, silver and precious stones will endure. If your foundation is in Christ, you will be saved, no matter what, but your life's ministry may be proven to have been only straw (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

So when someone is preaching with wrong motives, let God worry about judging them. Like many of us often say to our kids, "Don't worry about what they are doing; worry about what you do." If people are preaching wrong theology, yes, definitely say something. We are called to correct unsound doctrine. But if they are preaching the Gospel with impure motives, let them preach. Their motives are between them and God. You just keep doing your part in the mission, and keep checking your own motivations. Examine your own heart regularly. Make sure your ministry is being built of gold, silver and precious stones, not pre, hay and straw.

Week 2, Philippians 1:12-18

Took

Main Point: We can advance the Gospel through suffering.

Paul is speaking here about other people who have wrong motives and how he is treating them. But maybe we should turn the mirror on ourselves for a minute and examine our own hearts. Make sure that our motives are as honorable and pure as Paul's.

John Wesley lived a life that put on display his motivations, his heart for the Gospel. Wesley grew up in poverty; his father was an Anglican priest in one of England's lowest paying parishes. When Wesley became a teacher at Oxford, he lived in "luxury" compared to his father. He started at 30 pounds a year, enough for a single man to live comfortably. One day he noticed that one of the chambermaids had no coat and he reached into his pocket to give her some money to buy one. But he realized he had spent some of it frivolously earlier that day and didn't have enough left to help her. From that day forward, John Wesley committed to re-budget his life and live frugally so that he could give. At that point, he was making 30 pounds a year, so he spent 28 and gave away 2. But he committed to always only live on 28 pounds, no matter how much his salary increased. Over time, his salary increased, from 60 to 90 to 120 pounds. But he kept his budget at 28 pounds, so he was able to give away 2 pounds, then 32 pounds, then 62 pounds, then 92 pounds a year. Wesley said, "What should rise is not the Christian's standard of living, but his standard of giving." By the end of his life, even when his income reached 1,400 pounds, he continued to live on only 28 pounds and gave the rest away.⁴

What a difference in lifestyle. Because of the difference in *motivation*.

This illustration is only about financial gain as a motivation for ministry, but the "selfish gain" reason doesn't have to be financial. People can be in it for the glory, so that everyone will say what great people they are, or for the power or fame or some other sort of self-satisfaction.

How might our motives impact the way we approach ministry and the Church?

How can we be sure that our motives in advancing the Gospel are pure? Both in our own individual lives and in our church?

⁴ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1987/winter/87i1027.html>

How can we, as a Bible Fellowship, pray for one another to keep pure motives?

Challenges:

Look at your obstacles as a God-ordained opportunity. This life is full of ups and downs for everyone. But the Gospel-centered Christian is able to see all areas of life as opportunities to advance the mission. Someone may trust in Jesus because of your faith in times of difficulty. Others will be encouraged and emboldened.

Evaluate our motivations for ministry. Each of us must examine our own hearts to see our motivations for our ministry. Are we doing it for praise and glory – so people will say how great we are? Are we doing it for some sort of selfish gain? Or are we doing it for God’s glory? We must strive to do everything out of love rather than as an opportunity to advance ourselves. The goal must always be to advance the Gospel.

ⁱ Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 67.