

## Philippians 1:12-26

### *Squarely in the Center of God's Will*

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Paul is in prison. His readers could have easily concluded that his imprisonment would bring the building of the church of Jesus Christ to a standstill. Following his dramatic Damascus Road experience were three missionary journeys, dozens of church plantings—and outrageous persecution. Now our hero is locked up. With Paul in jail, Christianity is likely to suffer a major blow—if it even survives.

**How does Paul address that concern (v. 12)?** He announces that Christianity's demise is not imminent. In fact, his imprisonment is a good thing—a positive situation which would result in the advancement of God's program.

**How is Paul's imprisonment good for the gospel (v. 13)?** Paul's imprisonment means many people who would not have heard the gospel otherwise are now hearing it. Rather than being a waste of time, God is using Paul to share his testimony with others about his personal relationship with the Savior.

**Application: Has God ever “chained” you to anyone (in a hospital, office, dorm room, airplane, etc.) to share the gospel?**

**Why did Paul feel encouraged despite being in prison (v. 14)?** His example of aggressive witness and attitude had inspired the Roman Christians outside of prison to be more outspoken in sharing the gospel. Rather than keeping a lower profile because their leader was in chains, most of the local believers were boldly standing up for Christ and trusting Him as never before. The people are emboldened because they see:

- Paul's joy in the midst of his trial
- God is taking care of Paul.
- God is using Paul right where he is for His glory.

**What did God accomplish during Paul's “down time” of imprisonment?** Paul wrote the Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. These four letters, read by millions throughout the ages, have dramatically impacted the entire world for God's kingdom purposes! God redeemed Paul's prison time.

**Application: Like Paul, we should strive to have joy while in the midst of our “prison” experiences. What might those “prisons” be?** Health, job, financial, family issues; deployment, separation, grief, mourning, hardship, etc.

**How could Paul have joy in the midst of this trial? What was his secret?** Paul was focused outward beyond himself and his circumstances, always looking for an audience to talk with in proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. He had a sense of urgency. No self pity. He had learned to be content (4:11).

Instead of complaining about what God did *not* do—*Why me, God?*—Paul rejoices at what God is doing through him even in prison. Paul's witnessing audience includes many elite soldiers. *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).*

**What distinguishes the two types of Christians now witnessing and preaching more boldly (v. 15-17)?**

- Some were striving with their fellow believers to advance their own reputations, envious of Paul's prominence. Theirs was selfish ambition, and attempt to gain that same level of prominence.
- The others sincerely desired reaching the lost and meeting Paul's needs created by his confinement. Their motivation was out of love for God and Paul.

**How does Paul deal with the issue of motivation (v. 18)?** Motivation is important, but even more important is that the gospel is being proclaimed. In spite of the hostility from enemies outside the church and the evil designs of

detractors within, Paul is encouraged, believing it is better that even people with impure motives preach the truth of Jesus Christ than not preach Him at all.

**Application:** The power of the gospel does not depend on the character of the preacher. The gospel will have its way in the hearts and minds of people who hear: *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).* The power of the Word of God cannot be diminished by our performance.

**Why was Paul so confident that he continued to rejoice (v. 19)?** He knew the power of prayer – that the Philippians were praying for him and he knew his deliverance from the present situation was connected to their ongoing prayer. Prayer is a serious matter to Paul – and should be to us as well.

*God could have chosen to do His work on the earth in any fashion He wanted, but He chose in his sovereignty to do it in response to prayer—C.S. Lewis*

**Aside from the Philippians ongoing prayers, what other factor did Paul recognize as being required to meet his need?** The power of the Holy Spirit. Paul viewed his anticipated deliverance as a partnership between the Holy Spirit and Philippians' continual prayers – a great model for us. The power of prayer in conjunction with the Holy Spirit is unbeatable.

**What was Paul's concern (v. 20)?** He anticipated the need for courage so that he could stand firm and not be ashamed.

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).*

**Why would Paul be concerned about having sufficient courage?** He still had to stand before Caesar in a Roman trial. He doesn't fear for himself or for his life. His greatest desire was that he would continue to exalt Jesus Christ, whether he lived or died.

**How did the prospect of death affect his outlook on ministry (v. 21-26)?** No fear. Paul knew that death is not a defeat to the Christian. Death is a net gain – a graduation to glory. In fact, The Greek word for *desire* describes a strong longing. Paul's desire to depart was a strong one.

**Application (v. 21):** "For me to live is \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank).

As Paul did, the Christian can have a radically different view of death when compared with an unbeliever who has no hope for eternity.

**What was Paul's perspective on continuing in this life (v. 22-23)?** Despite his deep longing to be with Christ, the prospect of more years of life and service was not unattractive to the great apostle either. He saw living as an opportunity to continue serving Christ and building up His church. Paul's continued labor would produce fruit for eternity.

**What was Paul's understanding of where he was (v. 24-25)?** Though in prison awaiting trial before Caesar, Paul was confident he was squarely in the center of God's will for his life.

**Application:** Are you certain that you're in the middle of God's will for your life?

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