

STUDY GUIDE

PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
PHILIPPIANS: CITIZENS OF HEAVEN LIVING ON EARTH
THE ADVANCE OF THE GOSPEL
PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18
09/10/2017



MAIN POINT

Even our challenging circumstances are part of God's greater plan for the spread of the gospel.

INTRODUCTION

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

What's the most memorable thing that has ever happened to you while sharing your faith?

What obstacles or fears do you normally face when sharing both your faith in Christ and the experiences in your relationship with Him?

As we will see in Philippians 1, Paul could have easily let his circumstances override his proclamation of the gospel. Not only was he under house arrest in Rome, but plenty of people had rejected his teaching and lashed out against him. Instead of throwing in the towel, he continued to proclaim God's love to all who would listen to him. He encouraged the Philippian believers, and us, to do the same.

UNDERSTANDING

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

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 1:12-14.

Paul was in prison but joyful. What difficult circumstance are you dealing with today? What's your attitude toward this situation?

Why does it matter how Christians act in trying situations?

Paul noted that everyone who had been around him knew he was in prison because of his faith in Jesus. How well-known is your commitment to Christ to those with whom you associate daily? How can you tell?

Even though Paul was allowed to live in his own rented residence (see Acts 28:30), he remained chained to a Roman soldier. Undoubtedly he talked to these soldiers about becoming Christians, and perhaps some did. The reason for the apostle's imprisonment had become known to all of those in the imperial guard. It also had become common knowledge to everyone else. The entire imperial court knew that Paul's imprisonment was for Christ's sake.

Why did Paul say his imprisonment had been for good? Where has God been able to use bad for good in your life?

Have you ever been in a situation that you knew God was using to spread the gospel? If so, describe that experience.

Paul openly declared that his imprisonment was in the cause of Christ. He had been arrested and confined because he was a follower of Christ who proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. Paul had committed no crime; he was not a political prisoner. Paul's upbeat attitude and his consistent witness in his imprisonment gave most of his brothers (fellow Christians) in Rome confidence and inspired many to boldly speak about the message of God's saving grace in Christ.

What kinds of things must Paul have believed to be true about God in order to respond to his situation like this?

Who encourages you by the way they live for Christ? Describe a time when, like the Roman believers, someone else's struggle or suffering emboldened you to share the gospel.

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 1:15-18.

In verse 14, Paul pointed out that his courage under chains gave others the confidence and boldness to share the gospel, but Paul was also aware that some were taking advantage of his imprisonment to further their reputations as preachers.

Based on these verses, what negative result did Paul's situation have on others in the church?

For what reasons, good and bad, did Paul say people were motivated to proclaim the gospel? What motivates you most strongly to share the gospel?

Evidently, some people who were motivated to proclaim the gospel because of Paul's imprisonment did so out of envy. They envied Paul's reputation and success. Others, however, preached with the right motive—out of good will. Love motivated the latter. Preachers who competed with Paul tried to add to the agony of his confinement, perhaps by pointing to his imprisonment as evidence of his failure.

What are other inappropriate motives for lifting up the gospel? Why are they inappropriate? What steps can we take to avoid such motives?

Why do our motives for spreading the gospel matter?

According to verse 18, what was Paul's response to the various gospel proclamations taking place, regardless of the motive?

Both groups Paul mentioned were preaching Christ. The only difference was their motives for doing so. Nevertheless, Paul rejoiced because the message of Christ was being proclaimed. Such rejoicing, however, doesn't mean that Paul approved wrong motives. But what mattered most to Paul was that the good news was being spread. Even when Christ was proclaimed from impure or mixed motives, the gospel had inherent power to be effective. This truth gave Paul great joy.

APPLICATION

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

Why should suffering for the sake of the gospel increase our boldness (as it did Paul's), rather than decrease it? What can we be confident in amid suffering?

Have any of your circumstances—job, family, friendships, etc.—changed recently? If so, what new opportunities might exist for you to spread the gospel?

In addition to a verbal witness, how can we proclaim the gospel in places we go? In what sense do we represent Christ in all those places?

What needs to happen for the gospel to truly advance throughout our community and impact the lives of most people who live here?

PRAY

Close with a prayer of encouragement for your group, challenging them to pursue boldness this week. Thank God for the examples of Paul and others who show us how to make the advancement of the gospel a top priority in our lives.

COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18

Even though Paul was allowed to live in his own rented residence (see Acts 28:30), he remained chained to a Roman soldier. Undoubtedly he talked to these soldiers about becoming Christians, and perhaps some did. The entire imperial court knew that Paul's imprisonment was for Christ's sake. Furthermore, Paul's boldness in sharing his faith in Christ had inspired confidence in other believers to share the gospel with boldness. Their boldness was inspired by Paul's courage in the face of his life-threatening imprisonment.

Some were preaching Christ because they were envious of Paul. Others were proclaiming Christ out of good will. Both groups Paul mentioned were preaching Christ. The only difference was their motives for doing so. Nothing suggests that the first group was proclaiming a false message. Their message was theologically correct, but their motives were wrong. Nevertheless, Paul rejoiced because the message of Christ was being proclaimed. Such rejoicing, however, doesn't mean that Paul approved wrong motives. Elsewhere in Philippians he had a great deal to say about the importance of Christlike attitudes.

Paul continued his discussion of those who preached out of proper motivation. Their reason for preaching Christ was love. The term translated appointed means to exist for a specific purpose. Paul saw a divine purpose behind his imprisonment. That purpose was the defense of the gospel. Paul viewed this trial before Nero, the Roman emperor, as a benchmark in the spread of the Christian gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Indeed it was the single most important matter relative to the Christian faith to gain the empire's attention since Jesus' crucifixion.

The group Paul mentioned in verse 17 was proclaiming Christ out of wrong motives. The term for rivalry also could be translated "selfish ambition." The word was used of those who exhibited a self-seeking attitude even to the point of demeaning themselves or their cause. They were concerned only for their own selfish gain. Those who preached Christ out of rivalry wanted to cause problems for Paul during his imprisonment. They seemed to think they could bring harm to Paul or make him jealous of them because his freedom to travel and to preach had been seriously curtailed by his imprisonment. Instead, as his next statement shows, he rejoiced that Christ was being preached, regardless of the motivation. He assured the Philippians that those with false motives would not defeat himself or the gospel. Instead, false motives defeat those who have them.

Max Anders - Galatians-Colossians, vol. 8, *Holman New Testament Commentary*

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.

Richard R. Melick - Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, vol. 32, *The New American Commentary*

1:14 The second result of Paul's circumstances involved the church at Rome. A new evangelistic effort sprang up that affected the entire Christian community. Paul saw that his situation was the catalyst for this renewed interest in outreach, and he knew it would be good news to the church at Philippi.

In actuality, the church at Rome had two different reactions. Some members were encouraged by Paul and preached out of sympathy; others hoped to get Paul into more trouble with the Roman officials. Paul focused first on the brethren who supported him. In addition, he was able to see beyond the differences in motivation and realized that Christ was proclaimed. He was comforted by this reality.

Most of the Christians took heart from Paul's situation. They preached more courageously and fearlessly. Some commentators have suggested that the believers' preaching came because they knew that Paul's only crime was Christianity, and that was no crime at all. Before they had feared their own imprisonment; now that fear no longer existed. There is no evidence for that interpretation, however. While Paul's general tone was optimistic, he never indicated that he knew the trial would exonerate him. Paul actually stated that "the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak." He emphasized their spiritual motivation, not the evidence they might have derived from Paul's circumstances. Further, the context assumes their preaching was encouraged by the imprisonment, not by the expected release. As the next verses indicate, their support for Paul had given them courage to preach God's word.