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 Grace Evangelical Church  
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 "God's Desire For The Gospel"  
 Philippians 1:12-26

In a conversation with a man once, he told me about the pastor of a church who visited him after he had attended the service.

One of the first questions the pastor asked him was this:  
 "Are You Saved?"

The man responded by saying that he didn't know he was lost.

Eventually the man came to accept Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. I had the privilege to have his memorial service when he went home to be with his Lord some years later.

Jesus, in what is called the Great Commission, told us that we are to make disciples of all nations, of all peoples. He taught further that we are to be witnesses of Him – "My Witnesses" as the words of Christ are recorded in Acts 1:8.

What's involved in being a witness for Jesus? What's involved in giving testimony of what the Lord means to person and sharing what that means with others.

Our text in Philippians 1:12-26 has some answers for us.

**I. God uses the believer to be a witness for Him regardless of the circumstances in which he finds himself. (Philippians 1:12-13).**

Paul is in prison in Rome (A.D. 61) as he penned his letter to the Philippian believers. After his introduction and prayer for the Philippians, right out of the box, he tells his friends in Christ that his imprisonment has turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.

How so? Through his imprisonment Christ has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else.

**In his imprisonment, Paul wasn't thinking, "What is going to happen to me?"**

**Rather, Paul was thinking "how is the gospel cause affected by what happens to me?"**

**His answer was that the gospel wasn't being stopped, but rather the gospel was actually being advanced in a greater way by his imprisonment. Yes, Paul's imprisonment turned out to be an advancement of the gospel and the kingdom of God.**

**Even though the apostle Paul was bound, the gospel of Christ was not bound, indeed, the word of God cannot be bound.**

**One writer said that when Paul went to Rome the gospel went to Rome.**

**This means that . . . .**

**1. God can turn the negatives of life and use them to further His gospel through people available to HIM.**

**(1) Paul's Experience.**

In prison Paul is a witness to the whole praetorian guard.

I understand that the Roman praetorian guard was made of 9000 strong. Various members of that guard had been assigned to Paul at different times. Guard and prisoner were chained to each other, giving Paul a captive audience (Ephesians 6:20).

Paul evidently shared the gospel with each one. It would seem that some of the guard became believers in Jesus Christ. They probably told others of what happened to them and that they needed to accept Christ too. There well could have been a domino affect here.

Perhaps some of those who became believers in Christ in the guard were telling their friends outside the guard about Christ, for Paul added, **"and to everyone else."**

God turned Paul's imprisonment into an effective witness for Christ.

## **(2) Other biblical experiences.**

The Bible is full of examples of God using the negative experiences of His people to further His kingdom.

\*\*Joseph was cast into a pit and slavery, but in His providence, God eventually had Joseph promoted to Prime Minister of Egypt saving His people and the Messianic line (Genesis 37:24-36; 50:20).

\*\*Israel pursued by the Egyptian army was delivered by God opening up the Red Sea. Israel passed across on dry ground, and the Egyptian army was swallowed up by the sea as the path of deliverance for the God's people became a grave for the army as the sea closed drowning the army (Exodus 14-15).

\*\*Job deprived of his children, his possessions and health, arrived at a deeper understanding of God's power and love. In the end, God blessed Job two-fold (Job 1 & 2; 42:7ff).

\*\*Jehoshaphat threatened by his enemies offered a moving prayer to God and through praise God routed his enemies (II Chronicles 20).

\*\*Jeremiah who was cast into a muddy cistern and suffering other afflictions, coined this immortal phrase, "Great Is Your Faithfulness (Jeremiah 38:6; Lamentations 3:23).

\*\*Peter and John thrown into prison became more bold to proclaim the name of Christ once they were released from prison (Acts 4).

\*\*The ultimate of God turning a negative experience into an eternal victory, was Christ's death on the cross, His burial, and bodily resurrection. Through death, Christ provides the believer in HIM forgiveness and eternal life and the victory to live for Him in the midst of his negative experiences. That's why Paul's words continue to remind us that we can only glory in the cross of Jesus Christ.

### **\*\*For our experiences today.**

What happens to us when we experience the negatives of life? Do we get into a negative mood, or start complaining, or start thinking God is not around?

Or do we start thinking about what is God doing here, and teaching me about how he is furthering His kingdom through me. Do we think that God may want to use my circumstance for me to share the gospel with someone?

**For Paul it wasn't about him regardless of his circumstance, rather it was about what God was doing through him with the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

**Paul in the negatives saw God's hand at work to further the gospel through those negative circumstances. May we do the same!!**

**2. God uses the witness of one believer in his negative circumstance to be an encouragement to other believers to witness (Philippians 1:14).**

**"And that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear."**

## **Note what Paul says to the Philippians.**

### **(1) Don't be discouraged.**

**Any discouragement the Philippians have over Paul's imprisonment is dispelled immediately.**

Perhaps, Epaphroditus had told Paul about what the Philippian believers had been thinking now that they knew Paul was in prison.

Their thoughts may have had expressions like this:

"What is going to happen to Paul, will he be condemned or acquitted? Then, the people may have been thinking, "Too bad for him, and for the cause of the gospel, this imprisonment!"

**Paul immediately answers those discouraging thoughts that the Philippian believers may have been thinking and expressing.**

**No need to be discouraged. I appreciate your concern, but God is on the throne, and the gospel of Jesus Christ is making great progress and inroads into the praetorian guard and the whole city of Rome.**

**Rather than be discouraged, thinking that things are getting worse because of my imprisonment, be encouraged.**

### **(2) Be encouraged.**

Paul penned.

Be encouraged to witness for Christ where you are from the very fact that I have been able to witness for Him in my imprisonment. Don't feel sorry for me, my fellow believers at Philippi. Rather, take heart in your circumstances, whatever they are, for even in my imprisonment, God is letting me have opportunities to tell others about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's always an encouragement, isn't it, to hear about how someone else has an opportunity to share their faith whether, by life, or word, or with a piece of Christian literature. We know of some younger people who we still have contact with who are serving the Lord in missions. In fact one of the couples is in preparation for going to the mission field. How great to see their passion for Christ and for serving Him where God is leading them.

It is always an encouragement to us to be more fervent in our witness for Christ.

But in sharing our faith in Christ with others . . . .

## **II. God wants the believer to have the right motives when sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:15-18).**

There are different ways the gospel is being shared. But one must also keep the bigger picture in mind.

### **1. Out of love for God and others (1:15b-16, 18).**

Paul penned that some share Christ out of love and good will – knowing that he is imprisoned. They share the gospel in truth.

Paul himself has been sharing Christ with those in the praetorian guard because of His love for God and for the soldiers to whom he has been chained.

Paul told the Corinthians believers, "For If I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. . . . I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may be a fellow partaker of it." (I Corinthians 9:16, 23).

In II Corinthians 5:11, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men (meaning, knowing that men will be judged by the Lord) . . . . Then Paul went on to say that the love of Christ controls him, to do what? To engage in the ministry of reconciliation, to be an ambassador for Christ. Then Paul adds, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (II Corinthians 5:14, 20). For any one who is in Christ is a new creation, the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come (II Corinthians 5:17).

**Paul's passion to share the gospel came for a life that loved the Lord with His whole heart. He knew what Christ had done for him, and the love of Christ motivated him to share the gospel regardless of the circumstances in which he found himself.**

May that be why we share the gospel of Christ when God gives us the opportunity. We do it because we love Christ and want to share what he has done for us.

But then there is a way the gospel is being shared but it shouldn't be shared that way.

## **2. Out of envy and strife – selfish ambition (1:15, 17, 18).**

As believers in Rome heard about soldiers coming to know Christ and others as well because of Paul's imprisonment, some became jealous of what was happening.

They started envying what was resulting because of Paul's ministry. Perhaps, there were leaders in the fellowship who started to become jealous of Paul as they began to hear of what God was doing through him while in prison.

These leaders may have been losing some of their former prestige. Their names were no longer mentioned. Craving honor and prestige, they were proclaiming Christ out of selfish ambition.

Then note, Philippians 1:17b – "Thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment."

**These leaders of the church in Rome were so jealous of what God was doing through Paul in prison, they would like to aggravate Paul's affliction. Perhaps some of the leaders in the church were trying to demean Paul and his ministry in prison.**

**Such envy, strife, and selfish ambition can happen today when a person is not in prison as Paul was in his day.**

**One church can compare itself with another church. A smaller church can become jealous of a larger church. Or one church hears what God is doing in another church family, and starts envying what is happening there, for God is not doing that in their particular fellowship.**

**One pastor can compare himself with another pastor or say things that are not supportive. I received something in the mail this week describing a situation where a pastor in a locale was saying things about another pastor to discredit him.**

**Or in a local church, leaders can try to manipulate the situation so that their ideas can be instituted. Or there is comparing of one's self with others in the church family. The harmony of the Spirit is hindered and many times turned into dissonant sounds.**

From Philippians 4:1-3 some of that may have also been happening in the church of Philippi as Paul exhorts Eudonia and Syntyche to live together in harmony.

## **3. Keep in mind the bigger picture (1:18).**

These are some amazing words that the Apostle Paul used here in Philippians 1:18.

**"What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense (putting something forth to hide the true state of things), or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I will rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice."**

Christ was being proclaimed by those envious of the imprisoned Paul. Even in their selfish motives they were telling the gospel to others.

In his magnanimous spirit, Paul looked beyond their short comings, even though much of it was directed toward him and his ministry, and could rejoice because the gospel was going forth to those who needed desperately to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

It's amazing here, the self-forgetfulness of the apostle Paul.

He did not pity himself because of certain jealous preachers trying to win applause at his expense. The important thing was not what was said about him, but that the gospel of Jesus Christ was going forth.

Question can these kind of leaders render service to the gospel in any way?

The answer is yes, for the people did not know the bad motive of those presenting the gospel, they only heard the good preaching.

Whether covering up their bad motives in telling the gospel, or giving the gospel out with pure motives, that the gospel was being heralded was what made Paul rejoice.

**Paul's joy is so great when the gospel of Christ is given out that it crowds out every other circumstance.**

I think of some of the things that go on in biblical Christianity today where there are different views on things, and sometimes people are named for what they are doing as they are seeking the Lord. There are also those on television who have different ideas about how the Lord will bless you if you follow Him, prosperity gospel it is called.

My view is if the gospel of Jesus Christ is being presented biblically, that Jesus Christ, the God-man, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, was buried, and conquered the grave bodily for any who will accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior, it is not my place to be the critic. There may not be some things I agree with regarding what some groups do, but God keeps the books, and each of us will answer to the Lord.

**One who demonstrated such grace when he was criticized was Billy Graham. I have a great book in my library entitled, "The Leadership Secrets Of Billy Graham, by Harold Myra and Marshall Shelley.**

**The story is told when Billy Graham had a crusade in Los Angeles. Local pastors were involved in the crusade, but one pastor felt the meetings were hindering his church ministry by infringing on the Wednesday night prayer services. For 8 weeks this pastor called Billy personally to complain that his work was being hindered, and that Billy didn't care about local churches. Billy replied that they were trying to follow the leading of the Lord, and he wanted to encourage church members not hinder them. The pastor said that the congregation wanted to promote the meetings but they sensed the hostility of the pastor.**

**On the last weekend of the crusade, Billy Graham called the pastor and said, "Sir, I want to thank you for the leadership your church has provided in this series of meetings, and you would do me a great honor to sit with me on the platform. I would like to introduce you and ask you to lead in prayer. The pastor was overwhelmed."**

**Later, Cliff Barrows mentioned that this pastor asked Billy Graham to forgive him. He said that if he ever preached within a hundred miles of his church, he would be there, as would his congregation. They became great friends.**

Like the apostle Paul, Billy Graham knew how to turn the negative into a positive for the cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's why when someone was criticizing Billy Graham he told the person on his team who was very mad, "They're not talking about you! Why should you be mad? Billy stayed positive in the midst of criticism and the apostle Paul did.

May we be the same way. It's for the cause of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

### **III. God wants the believer to live out the gospel boldly in his or her life (Philippians 1:19-26).**

As Paul thought a little more about his life, for his trial in Rome had probably begun, he reflects on his own life.

Note his thought processes here.

#### **1. God is able to deliver – He is in control (1:19-21a).**

Through the prayers of others in the intervention of God, he can be released from prison. Regardless of what happens, he wants to keep being bold for Christ in his life. For him to live is Christ (1:21a).

#### **2. If God doesn't deliver – to go to be with Christ is gain – God is still in control (1:21b).**

To die is gain means profitable, for he will be in the presence of Christ whom he loves and serves.

#### **3. If he stays on planet earth, he will be able to minister to others including the Philippian believers (1:22-26) – God is still in control.**

In verse 22, Paul says that if he stays on earth, there will be fruit, others who will hear the gospel of Christ and believe in Christ.

**At the same time, Paul also knows that being with Christ is much better (1:23), but he knows that ministering to others will mean the opportunity to touch the lives of the Philippians. He believes he will be acquitted for he is still needed to share the gospel with others.**

When Paul is released from prison it will be a time of rejoicing for the Philippians knowing that Christ has delivered him from prison (1:26).

**Paul displays an unswerving confidence in the sovereignty of God here. He knows that whether he dies or he lives, he is the Lord's.**

**In life he will still proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

**In death, it will be the gospel that guarantees him to be with his Lord forever.**

**He stands boldly in Christ and His gospel knowing that he is in the Lord's hands.**

It's the same for each of us here today. Whether we live or we die, we are the Lord's.

I know I have called on people later in life who wonder sometimes why God hasn't taken them home to be with himself. If a person is still in good health and can pray, that is the reason I believe. Prayer is where the battle is fought and won. I know of one lady who spent in her later years praying for missionaries. What a ministry of prayer she had. Only eternity will reveal the results of her praying.

### **IV. The gospel of Jesus Christ should be our passion. (Philippians 1:12).**

#### **1. It's unstoppable – the more man tries to stop the gospel the more it flourishes.**

Even in prison, Paul was used to tell others of the gospel of Christ.

Pastor Harlan Popov was placed in 13 years of confinement for preaching the gospel of Christ. Once during a long period of solitary confinement, he used a tin cup to tap out the gospel message in code on the water pipes in his cell. To his astonishment, an answer came back, "I am ready to believe, what must I do to be saved?"

That's why the Lord said that He would build His church and the gates of hades, of death, of the devil, would not prevail against it.

**2. It's life-changing – the gospel provides the believer a new life, resurrection** life, the individual becomes a new creation in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17).

What happened when you accepted Christ as your personal Savior? You became a new creation in Christ. What happens when someone you share the gospel with accepts Christ as personal Savior. That individual becomes a new creation in Christ – placed into God's family, into God's eternal kingdom forever.

**3. It's what makes our lives worth living for time and eternity.**

**The gospel is not just a message to believe for salvation, for forgiveness and eternal life, it is also a life-style, where for the believer lives for Christ. As Paul stated in that famous verse in Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain."**

There was some letters some time ago that said, "WWJD?"

They meant, "WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?" The words were worn as bracelets and other ways as well.

That's why Paul goes on in the next section, Philippians 1:27-30, and challenges the Philippians to live worthy of the gospel.

No gospel, not lasting meaning in this life, and in the life to come.

**How would we rate our passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

One of the reasons you can tell is if you are available to share your faith with someone when the opportunity arises.

That's why I have put a tract in the bulletin today. This tract can be given to someone you know or you don't know. It can be left with a tip at a restaurant. Or you can give a tract to the person at the filling station.

There are also other tracts on the table if you would a tract that has a little different approach.

**Why not be a blessing to someone this week, and give a person a tract. Or say a word in season for Christ as He gives you the opportunity.**

**YOU WILL BE GLAD YOU DID!!**