

# PHILIPPIANS

## JOY ON THE JOURNEY

Sermon-Based Study Guide  
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Philippians 1.12-18a  
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Prepared by Curtis Bronzan  
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

### I. Connecting With One Another

Can you recall a time when something didn't work out the way you wanted? (That shouldn't be too hard, right!?) Did anything good come from it? (Think hard!)

### II. Introduction to this Study

Last week we began our fall series Joy on the Journey, engaging Paul's greeting to the "saints" in Philippi. In 1.12-18a, our text for this week, we begin to see the source of Paul's joy, though he is imprisoned as a religious and political criminal! What's more, in this passage, the Apostle to the Gentiles explains how his difficulties are actually being used by God to spread the good news of Jesus! Can you imagine!?

### III. Study the Text

a. In the first century, the vast majority of the population was illiterate; it's estimated that only 15% of the population could read. As Paul wrote this, then, he intended it not so much to be *read*, but *heard*. Of course, most of us have the benefit of doing both! However, as we get into the body of the letter, in order to get a feel for what it's like only hearing it, try having someone in your group read it aloud – or find a recording online (one is available at <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>).

b. As Paul launches into the *narratio* (the narrative part of his letter), he updates the Philippians on his general well being, since he hasn't seen them in four years! Read Philippians 1.12-14. Notice how little time Paul spends explaining what has happened! Why do you think this is? What else has his attention? (for a hint, count up the times Paul writes "Christ," "Lord," "God" or "Gospel" in only 7 verses)

To learn more about "what has happened" to Paul, pick up the story in Acts 21.17, which continues through the end of the Book of Acts in chapter 28. Or, for a similar, condensed account, check out 2nd Corinthians 11.22-12.10.

c. Read Acts 19.1-22. Notice the great things God was doing through Paul – imagine how many churches would have liked him to stay as their pastor! And yet, he was committed to keep travelling, proclaiming the good news in Jerusalem and Rome. Why do you think he would want to visit such places? Especially when traveling could be so dangerous!?

As you may have read earlier in Acts, Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and, after several trials, taken to Rome, not as a *preacher*, but as a *prisoner*. Read Philippians 1.12-14 again. Does Paul seem discouraged? Why or why not?

Paul notes that, due to his imprisonment, "the whole palace guard" has recognized that he's in chains for Christ. The Greek word *praetorium* refers to the 9,000 guards in the holy city. Paul was most likely chained to one of these guards 24 hours a day, with a new guard every four to six hours! What do you think they talked about?

d. Read Romans 8.28-39. Compare and contrast what Paul writes there with Philippians 1.12-14. What similarities do you see? Differences?

Read Genesis 50.15-21. Compare and contrast Joseph's interaction with his brothers (who 'intended to harm him'!) with Paul's situation in Philippians. What similarities do you see? Differences?

- e. Paul writes, "what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." The word "advance" is the Greek *prokopē*, which recalls a progressive movement toward a given objective in spite of obstacles. How does that fit with what's going on here? What are the obstacles? How is it advancing? Notice that Paul does not identify who is responsible for this *prokopē*-ing. Why do you think that is? Who is responsible? Paul? Someone else?

"Gospel" comes from the Greek *euangelion*. In the first century, this term was used to by Caesar to declare a Roman military victory. How would you define Paul's usage here?

If you're studying this *before* gathering for worship this weekend, how do you understand "the gospel"? If you're studying this *after* gathering for worship, what did you think of Curtis' definition of "the gospel"? How does it differ from how you've heard it explained elsewhere?

- f. Read Philippians 1.15-18. Why do some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry?

Have you ever seen this kind of thing take place? Have you ever been the "victim" of someone "preaching" (even if it wasn't faith-related) out of envy and rivalry? What was your response? How was your response similar to or different from Paul's? Why do you think he responded the way he did?

Read 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1.10-31. What similarities do you see in these verses with Philippians 1.15-18? Why does Paul instruct the Corinthians to "boast in the Lord"? How, if at all, should this verse challenge how we discuss denominational differences?

#### IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. We've seen how little Paul discusses "what has happened" to him (and had to look at Luke's account in Acts or Paul's second letter to the Corinthians to hear the specifics). When things go wrong in your life, how much time do you spend talking about it? How much time praying about it? How much time imagining how God could use it for His glory?
- b. Paul is *literally* chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day. What are you chained to (maybe it feels like being chained - maybe not)? Your job? Your kids? Your medical difficulties? How could those things be used by God to declare the gospel?
- c. When Paul discusses those "preaching the gospel" he doesn't mean "from a pulpit, in church." He means sharing in normal, everyday conversation. Is there anyone whose chains have encouraged you "to speak the Word of God more courageously and fearlessly?" Who is it? How did *their* circumstances give confidence to *your* witness?
- d. American culture has recently seen a drastic decline in church attendance. Does that discourage you? Are there ways you see the gospel "advancing" anyway, even in the midst of obstacles?
- e. What else have you found interesting in these verses?

#### V. Pray

Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Ask God to help you recognize how you react when things go wrong - and ask for help in responding in light of His presence, grace and peace,
- b. Lift up the reality of your chains, praying you would have eyes to see the ways God can use them for His glory,
- c. Pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to advance the gospel in the midst of our country, in our neighborhoods, in our homes, and in our personal lives.