
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read Philippians 1.12-14. Paul called believers in Philippi and those in Rome “brothers” [or “brothers and sisters,” depending on your translation; the Greek term could be used for either, or even “fellow members” of the church]. This term reflected the strength and intimacy of the relationships in the church.

After a greeting in which Paul called himself a slave of Christ and the Philippians saints in Christ [1.1-2], an expression of thanksgiving for their past participation in the gospel mission and confidence God would complete that work in them [1.3-8], and a prayer that they would grow to discern what was right [1.9-11], knowing that would lead them to continue partnering with him in the gospel mission, Paul indicated in 1.12 that he had a new idea related to what had just been said [signaled by the Greek *δέ* (DEH)]; then he said “I want you to know...” signaling this was an important and defining thought. What did he want them to know? Did he talk about the conditions of his cell or his diet in jail? No, his singular thought was to assure them that his imprisonment had *actually* helped *advance* the gospel.

Most English translations include “actually” [or “really”; but not NASB and NLT]. The word “actually” suggests Paul knew this would surprise his readers. No doubt most of them thought imprisonment must put a stop to, or seriously hinder, his ministry efforts; and some were doubting God’s blessing on his gospel and his mission, thinking God put him in jail to stop him. Paul might have chosen the word “advance” [*προκοπή*; prah-kah-PAY] because they would expect the word for hindrance [*προσκοπή*; prahs-kah-PAY]; the wordplay highlighting the surprise distinction.

Reflect: What reaction would you expect from this news? How does this build on what Paul has been saying in 1.1-11 [see summary above]? How can your times of suffering serve to advance the gospel? In what ways will you have to be like Paul in those times of suffering for them to serve to advance the gospel? Pray to grow as needed for this.

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read Philippians 1.12-14 [try a different translation each day]. The imperial guard were elite soldiers, primarily serving as Caesar’s bodyguard, but also as secret police and security for the games in the city. Perhaps some guarded the prisoners who were on “death row,” and expected to be fed to the lions at the games. “Everyone else” likely refers to the rest of the people serving Caesar directly, those in the highest government offices. Thousands of people in positions of influence had heard about Paul and his imprisonment for Christ’s gospel! Surely not all these people had come to his cell, so there must have been a lot of social buzz about his situation. Paul said they knew his imprisonment was for the sake of Christ. There are multiple reasons to say he was in jail for the sake of Christ: He was jailed originally for his public defense of Christ’s gospel; he remained in prison because he would not compromise to get out; and God had put Paul there to spread the gospel to these very people. How Paul wrote this in Greek suggests that he is in jail because as a believer he is “in Christ,” and part of his discipleship is to be a slave of Christ, willing to suffer for Christ [as he will say later in the letter], to share in Christ’s sufferings as he experiences the power of Christ’s resurrection [3.10].

Reflect: Human reasoning suggested imprisonment was a tragedy, but Paul said it turned out to be an opportunity. Human reasoning suggested imprisonment might be a judgment, but Paul implied it was part of God’s plan for him, to advance the gospel mission. We can easily misinterpret events in our lives, assigning to them a theological value that is unwarranted by scripture, but which seems to make sense to flawed human reasoning from our upbringing and culture. This leads us to react wrongly, suffering doubt, fear, anguish, and anger, when we should be looking for how our situation can serve the cause of Christ. Think over the hardships you have faced or are facing. Have you seen them as merely tragic or found a way to use them for God’s glory? Do these hardships reflect God’s neglect or personal judgment, or is this just part of the Christian life, to suffer but endure for God’s glory? Pray to suffer well.

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read Philippians 1.12-14 one more time. Based on the context of 1.12 & 15, the “word” [NET] or “message” [NLT] clearly is the gospel of Jesus Christ [NIV]. Because Paul resolutely continued to walk by faith and

obedience, even continuing to share the gospel while in prison, other believers dared to preach the gospel without fear. Paul's confidence in Christ and trust that the way of Christ always is best helped others to have that confidence and trust. The Greek word *τολμάω* [tahl-MAH=oh] is to show boldness or resolution in the face of danger, opposition, or a problem. It is translated as "dare" in the NET, NIV, HCSB [others refer to confidence, courage, or boldness]. Paul suffered for the gospel, and reacted by sharing that gospel with the elite soldiers of the emperor himself. That inspired others to risk imprisonment, hostility, violence, persecution, to share the gospel also. Paul hopes sharing this news will inspire the Philippians to remain partners in the gospel mission with him.

Reflect: In much of the world, Christians have these same fears today. They too must be emboldened by Paul's example to dare to speak the word fearlessly in their societies. What about those of us who live in a place where our worst fear is mild mockery and exclusion, should we not also be bolder to speak the word of the gospel of Jesus Christ, if we truly believe? What do you fear most about what could happen if you are openly evangelistic? How can you get past those fears, what steps can you take? Are you inspired by Paul's example? Pray about all this.

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read Philippians 1.14-17. In 1.16, Paul mentions others know he was "placed" [NET, ESV, NIV] or "appointed" [NASB, HCSB, NLT] for the defense of the gospel. The Greek verb *κεῖμαι* could mean that God *set* Paul right where he wanted him, in prison, so Paul would continue his defense of the gospel there; or it could mean that God *appointed* Paul for the defense of the gospel, a subtle reference to Paul being appointed as an apostle. Either way, imprisonment was part of God's plan for Paul and his gospel mission.

Like speaking the word in 1.14, preaching Christ in 1.15 refers to sharing the gospel of Christ. Most of the believers in Rome had been emboldened by Paul's example to share the gospel despite the danger. Some of these believers *know* God appointed Paul as an apostle and placed Paul in prison for the sake of the gospel mission; they understand that there is nothing shameful in his imprisonment. These people are preaching Christ as Paul's loving allies. Others are preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, *supposing* to cause Paul pain as they seek to surpass his influence. Based on 1.14, all are brothers and sisters in the church, true believers, with the correct gospel.

Reflect: What is your goal in the ministry work you do, to bring glory to yourself or to God? to benefit yourself or others? Pray for God to strip you of any selfish ambition! At least even those who were trying to upstage Paul were preaching the correct gospel. How careful are you to prepare yourself to speak God's truth accurately? Think of all the situations where this might be necessary: someone wants to know what you believe, why you have hope, why you are a changed person; someone is sinning or encouraging you to sin; someone is in a cult or other false religion; your loved ones are reading false teachings in novels or hearing them on tv... how important is it that you be prepared to answer for your faith and represent God in these situations? What can you do to get ready? What can you do if you are not able to answer well at some point?

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read Philippians 1.14-18a [up to the last sentence of 1.18]. Paul was in prison for the gospel, and now there were people in the city who were trying to build their own ministries at his expense, hoping he would have the envy that they felt. Paul shrugged that off. His only concern was that they were indeed sharing the correct gospel and thus the work of Christ, the work of the gospel mission, was getting done. Despite his own circumstances, he could rejoice at what was happening in Rome, that the believers there were boldly sharing the gospel, and that his imprisonment had encouraged them and spread the gospel to the imperial guard and other government workers.

Reflect: Do you ever find yourself resenting someone else's success? Do you rejoice when another person or another church is more successful at the gospel mission than you or your church? Pray for God to strip you of any envy or rivalry. Could you rejoice if you knew you needed to suffer, but that suffering would help others find faith and still others live out their faith? Pray that you would have the right perspective and attitudes about life's ups and downs, and that every aspect of your life could glorify God and help others find and follow Jesus Christ. Pray that you would be able to rejoice – to feel joy from the Holy Spirit – even when things are not going well for you in life.

