

# Finding Purpose in Hard Times

Finding Joy in Hard Times--part 2

Phil. 1:12-21; September 30, 2018

## DAY 1: Perspective matter...

1. The theme of the book of Philippians is “finding joy in hard times.”
2. We will have a hard time understanding this book as long as we believe joy has to do with:
  - Pleasant circumstances,
  - Things going “smoothly,”
  - My problems being solved when/where/how I want them solved.
3. The book highlights two different routes to joy that we never imagined possible:
  - Emptiness→Thirst→Hope→Joy of Anticipation.
  - Brokenness→Grace→Gratitude→Joy of Acceptance and Purpose.

4. As you read our passage for the week, try to put yourself in Paul’s place (prison)

*Philippians 1:12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup> Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. <sup>15</sup> It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. <sup>16</sup> The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. <sup>18</sup> But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.*

5. We will dissect this passage this week, but for now, what strikes you about Paul’s perspective and priorities?

6. Does Paul see a connection between purpose, perspective, priorities and his joy? What connections do you see?

**DAY 2. Focus on God's purposes more than your problems.**

*Philippians 1:12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.*

1. This is amazing considering what Paul had been through in the previous year. He was falsely accused, nearly lynched, taken into custody, escaped a deadly plot on his life, endured a prolonged storm at sea, a shipwreck, a bite from a deadly snake, hauled off to Rome, had been languishing in a Roman prison awaiting trial as he writes these words!

2. What would you say is Paul's predominant purpose?

3. How does this affect his perspective?

*Philippians 1:13 As a result, it has become clear throughout **the whole palace guard and to everyone else** that I am in chains for Christ.*

4. Every few hours, a new set of palace guards are assigned to Paul. They are known as the Praetorian Guard. The Praetorian Guard was the Emperor's bodyguards. The future leaders of the Roman Empire were involved, here.

5. Consider all the things Paul could have said about his guards—complaints, grumbling, criticism, etc. But his mind is not going in that direction! What is important to Paul regarding the palace guard?

*Phil. 1:14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.*

6. In addition, God has used Paul's suffering to be a great encouragement to the Christians in Rome!

7. What strikes you most about Paul's purpose?

8. How does that affect his perspective?

### **DAY 3: Focus on God's priorities more than your prestige.**

1. Living the Christian life is hard enough in a non-Christian world, but it can become more challenging when people who claim to be Christians act in ways that look “Christian” but are driven by selfish motivations.

2. This was one of Paul’s “extra” challenges!

*Phil. 1:15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will.*

*Phil. 1:17 (Some) preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.*

3. List the difficulties Paul observed in some of the people around him who claimed to be doing the Lord’s work:

4. By this time in Paul’s life he had become “famous.” He had become “a big fish in the big pond.” How do little fish usually respond?

*Phil. 1:18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.*

5. How does Paul respond in this challenging situation?

6. “The important thing” is a statement about priority. Priority comes from the root word “prior.” It’s a statement of importance.

7. Notice his response! He rejoices!

8. I find this staggering. When I am faced with some painful questioning of my motives, I don’t rejoice. I sulk. I just emotionally walk over to my own little chair in my own little cave and stew. Paul’s response staggers me considering not only his physical suffering, but also the pettiness and small-heartedness of his critics.

9. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

#### **DAY 4. Focus on God's power, not your power.**

*Phil. 1:19 ...Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.*

1. Life sometimes stretches us to what seems beyond our limits. We're running out of human power.

2. Paul mentions two supernatural sources of power for living. What are they?

3. Not surprisingly, in our culture, a lot of people look at Christianity as a crutch. "Too bad, *you* need a crutch. Not me."

4. *It all depends on what you need a crutch for.* If the objective is to be able for me to walk around the block, I don't need a crutch. But if I'm hiking in the high Sierras, I'll need a crutch and a whole lot more!

5. Paul was looking to God's power "...for his deliverance." What do you think he meant by his deliverance? Did he mean release from prison, or something else?

6. Perhaps you need power to:

- Stop being a screaming mother,
- Stop being a harsh husband,
- Drop an addiction,
- Turn from being a worry wart to contentment,
- Stop your part in petty arguments.

7. There is a difference between feeling powerful and acting powerfully.

**DAY 5: Focus on pleasing God, not pleasing yourself.**

*Phil. 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

1. How would you fill in this line: “For to me, to live is \_\_\_\_\_.” What things come to mind?

2. Usually we’d think better circumstances and better relationships. Maybe you thought of: a better house, bills paid, not so much stress, kids doing well in school, everyone healthy, or a nice vacation.

3. When have you ever heard someone say, “For to me, to live is Christ.” Real life is found only in Christ.

4. When someone commits suicide, we lament, “Oh, he had soooo much to live for.” And by that we usually mean, he had so much, or he had some great strengths, or he had such a great job or great opportunities.

5. Possessions, popularity, pleasure, position, prestige—they all cry out the song of the sirens on the island as our ship passes by. It all sounds so alluring, like any of those would be “real” life. But then the brutal winds of reality come howling at you!

- None of that is enough to fill you.
- All of that is not enough to fill you.

6. It’s only a matter of time until you discover that. Hopefully, you’ll discover this sooner than later. Even if you never discover it in this life, you will, to your horror, discover it the second after you enter the next life.

*Phil. 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

7. When our central intent is to please ourselves, we are on the road to frustration and misery. But when our central intent is to please God, we are back on the road to purpose and fulfillment! It is quite the paradox!

8. What strikes you the most from today’s verse?