

June 15, 2014

Handling Life's Difficulties
Philippians 1:12-14 & 4:10-13

All Stand and Read Scripture

Philippians 1:12-14

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹² Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, ¹³ so that my imprisonment in *the cause of* Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 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.

Philippians 4:10-13

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁰ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Prayer

INTRODUCTION:

I will be starting a new series of messages from the book of Philippians. The apostle Paul wrote this in prison. It is considered a **prison epistle** along with the books of **Ephesians**, Colossians, and Philemon. He wrote these from a Roman prison. His circumstances at this time wasn't what we would consider to be good. As a matter of fact he didn't know if he was going to live or die. He didn't even know what was in his future.

The key words to the book of Philippians is the words **joy** and **rejoice**. Now you wouldn't expect that. You would think that he must have written Philippians from a resort somewhere, but he wrote the book from a Roman prison. You wouldn't expect a book whose key word is joy and rejoicing to be written in prison, would you?

The book of Philippians is a great book to read when you are dealing with difficulties in your life.

What to do in Life's Difficulties.

I would like to share a couple of things, that we learn from Paul's example, that we can do to cope with problems that occur in our life. If you are not facing problems right now, you will be one of these days. Remember Philippians, it will be a blessing to you.

BODY:

Philippians chapter one is our first **do**.

I. Focus your Mind on the Positives.

I am going to tell you something right now, folks. When a difficulty comes around, **negative thinking** will really pull you down. When negative thinking takes over, it will **bleed you dry spiritually** and it will **sap your strength**. Negative thinking will make you lose the strength that you need to respond and overcome the problem.

Negative thinking will reveal itself in your **tongue** and in your **countenance**. People around you will feel and see it immediately.

When someone is thinking negatively, nothing is positive with them. All they can see and talk about are the "bad" things that are happening around them. Their confidence goes way down.

ILLUSTRATION:

BODY LANGUAGE.

You hear MLB baseball announcers talk about a pitcher who is struggling frequently. When a pitcher becomes rattled, he will lose his confidence and it will start to show.

- He slaps the ball into his glove.
- He shakes off pitches.
- He walks off the pitching rubber.
- He takes more time between pitches.
- He won't throw a certain pitch because he hasn't been able to hit the strike zone with it.

Hitters can see his confidence fading by his body language, and they will take advantage of the situation. They will know, for example, that if he is struggling with his curve ball they will sit on a fast ball.

A good baseball pitcher will show confidence even when he is struggling. He will not let his body language show that he is struggling.

So, focus on positives, not the negatives.

Notice verse 12.

Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.

Here is Paul writing from a Roman prison cell. He is in chains. He was serving the Lord when he was arrested. As a matter of fact, he was arrested for serving the Lord. So he wasn't in jail for doing anything wrong. He was put in prison in spite of all the good things that he was doing. He never had this much trouble when he was a Pharisee persecuting Christians. Now that he is serving Christ, the difficulties are really piling up in Paul's life!

Paul had many negative things happening to him in prison, but **notice** how he focused on positive instead of the negatives in this text.

“I want you to understand that what happened to me hasn't hindered the gospel, it rather has furthered the gospel.”

Verse 13 says:

My imprisonment in *the cause of Christ* has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else.

Another positive: People working the prison, people in Rome, and maybe even Caesar himself, were hearing the gospel of Christ proclaimed.

Verse 14 says:

Most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

Another Positive: People looked at the example of Paul continuing to serve God, even in prison, and gained more courage to preach the Gospel themselves.

ILLUSTRATION:

I wondered, if I was imprisoned in Rome and I was writing a letter to Greenwood Christian Church, what would I write?

- I don't why God allowed me to get thrown in this Roman prison.
- All I was trying to do was serve the Lord.
- The chains are hurting my ankles.
- The food, when I get it, is lousy.
- There is no air conditioning.
- The guards are hateful.
- I am sleeping on a dirt floor with no pillow.
- The whole place **stinks!**

You would get my letter and say, “Poor Wayne!”

But that is not what Paul did.

He didn't focus on the negatives. He focused on the positive. Not only is it a great testimony to other people, but it is a powerful cure for life's problems.

If you don't **get control of your mind**, then that negative thinking will eat you alive and **your countenance will reflect it** (like the baseball pitcher) and **your talk will reflect it**.

We tend to say, "There are no positives."

Is there not? If you are saved there is plenty of positives if you will just count them all. You just have to focus on them.

II. View All Situations as Coming from God.

Do you view all situations as coming from God?

Do you trust the sovereignty of God and believe that He will provide all your needs?

Philippians 4:11.

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

Paul learned to be content in whatever circumstance he was in. Notice, he said he learned this. This knowledge **does not come automatically**.

You learn it by trusting in God!

If you were chained in a Roman prison and you didn't know whether you would live or die, would you be content with that situation?

Paul's view was that he knew **God had brought him into this circumstance**.

He served God, even in prison, because he knew that God had brought him there. It wasn't something that **happened by accident**. God had control and He put him there for a purpose.

He viewed his circumstances as coming from God and that is how he could be content.

III. Praise God Even When You Don't Feel Like It.

Philippians 4:4

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

Sometimes I don't feel like praising him. My body doesn't feel like it. My mind doesn't feel like it.

Does your mind always feel like praising? Sometimes you don't feel like praising. You praise him anyhow. Praise him even when you don't feel like it. You don't always feel like it. When you are going through a difficulty sometimes you don't feel like praising, if you are human.

Keep in mind who is writing and where he is writing from. Paul is writing from prison.

What does it say?

“Rejoice in the Lord always.”

Now it doesn't say to rejoice in the Lord sometimes. It doesn't say just rejoice in the Lord when things are peachy, did it? Because things aren't always going to be peachy for you.

It says to rejoice in the Lord always. That is something you choose to do, isn't it? You have got to choose to rejoice in the Lord.

I would like to give you a couple of reasons that all of us as Christians have to praise God, regardless of our circumstances.

1. Praise God for His Mercy.

You know, I don't know what problems you are facing right now in your life, but you can always praise God for his mercy. If it wasn't for God's mercy I would still be a sinner. If it wasn't for his mercy I would still be under condemnation.

When I think of how God sent His Son to die on the cross for my sins, sins that I committed and deserve to be punished for, it wants me want to praise him.

Lord, thank you for your mercy.

Mercy is getting that which you do not deserve. If I got what I deserved, I would be full of sin with no chance of making it right with God. I would be eternally condemned to death, I death separated from God as I deserve. But by His mercy, I have a new birth and a new life in Christ.

Is that something to praise God for?

2. Praise God for your inheritance.

Do you realize that as a Christian, you have an inheritance?

You might have a worldly inheritance, but you are just borrowing that and it isn't going with you when you die. **But, we have a heavenly inheritance.**

God has promised us that if we serve Him on earth, we will get to spend an eternity in heaven with Him.

Are there any problems that we face that can overshadow this promise?

PRAISE GOD ALWAYS!

We should praise God for his mercy.

We should praise Him for the opportunity to serve Him.

We should praise Him for the promised inheritance of eternal life with Him.

Paul could have looked at his current situation in prison and chose to feel sorry for himself, but he made the decision to praise.

WHY? Because, he saw the bigger picture, he understood everything that God was giving him. He never even let the thought of “**not feeling like it**” even cross his mind.

Remember the story of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16?

Paul and Silas had been beaten with rods and thrown into prison. What did they do at midnight after being beaten and stripped and mocked and for doing good?

At midnight they prayed and sang praises. Why did they do that? It was because they saw the bigger picture. They saw the eternal picture. **Despite being in great pain**, they knew that the Lord gave them **grace** and a **promised inheritance**.

CONCLUSION:

This all leads back to the way we think. We always have reasons to praise God.

- Do focus on the positives, not the negatives.
- View all situations as coming from God.
- Praise him even though you may not feel like it.

Do you look at your life in this way? Do you realize that God is in control and you are where you are right now because He has placed you there? God wants you to be happy where you are and in the circumstance that you are in.

God is going to take those hard circumstances and put a good purpose and twist on them and cause them to work for good. **That is the promise of God!**

Let's look once again at Acts 16.

Acts 16:25-34

New American Standard Bible (NASB)

²⁵ But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; ²⁶ and suddenly there came a

great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!" ²⁹ And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, ³⁰ and after he brought them out, he said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹ They said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. ³³ And he took them that *very* hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his *household*. ³⁴ And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household.

If you do not know Christ as your personal Savior, the window of opportunity is open for you, just as it was for the Philippian jailer. God wants to come into your life. Won't you come forward this morning and let God know that you are ready to turn your life around and start living your life for Him?

I encourage you to see the bigger picture. Think positive and know that your current situation is coming from God. Praise Him for His mercy and His promises. If the Holy Spirit is convicting you this morning, open your heart to Him and focus your life on heavenly treasures that have eternal value.

We are also here with open arms, if you would like to identify yourself as part of this family of God in the Greenwood Christian church.

The Family of God

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God.
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family, the family of God.