

LESSON TWO
TRIUMPH IN TROUBLE
(Philippians 1:12-13)

REFLECTION

Control is a big deal to most people. We like to have our schedules planned out ahead of time so we can know what we want to accomplish each day. But how do you typically respond when life doesn't cooperate with your plans? What do you do?

SITUATION

The believers in Philippi had learned Paul was in prison, and it is clear from the apostle's next words that many in the church had become discouraged at this apparent setback. However, Paul reminds the believers that even though *he* might be stuck in a Roman prison, God is still sovereign and at work in the world, orchestrating events to bring about the execution of his perfect will. Paul seeks here to deflect the attention from his own plight and encourage the Philippian believers that his imprisonment has actually served to *advance* the gospel of Christ.

OBSERVATION

Read **Philippians 1:12-18** (New King James Version).

EXPLORATION

1. Looking at the Scriptures that are presented, it appears or sounds like Paul had no problem adjusting to life behind bars or being "in chains" under house arrest. When Paul was a persecutor of the church he was "all in." Now, he is fully focused on kingdom building, not his personal circumstances.
2. Paul says that his imprisonment has turned into a positive situation because it has led to the furtherance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Word is being manifested in the palace of Caesar and in all other places.
3. Paul's imprisonment caused other believers to have renewed confidence in the Lord and to have more courage to speak the Word of God.
4. Paul didn't care if some were preaching about Christ out of envy or rivalry to him as long as Christ was being preached.
5. Paul refused to dwell on the negative aspects of his situation. I think that a person develops this habit by retraining the mind, through the aid of the Holy Spirit, to look for and focus on the positive aspects of a situation. These aspects may be smart nuggets, but they are worth looking at. Also, I believe Paul didn't focus on himself, but the cause of Christ.

6. What bad situations are present in your life right now? How does this passage help you to view those situations?

INSPIRATION

In the treatment of anxiety, a proper understanding of sovereignty is huge. Anxiety is often the consequence of perceived chaos. If we sense we are victims of unseen, turbulent, random forces, we are troubled...

That's why the most stressed-out people are control freaks. They fail at the quest they most pursue. The more they try to control the world, the more they realize they cannot. Life becomes a cycle of anxiety, failure, anxiety, failure, anxiety, failure. We can't take control, because control is not ours to take.

The Bible has a better idea. Rather than seeking total control, relinquish it. You can't run the world, but you can entrust it to God. This is the message behind Paul's admonition to "rejoice in the Lord." Peace is within reach, not for lack of problems, but because of the presence of a sovereign Lord.

Rather than rehearse the chaos of the world, we can rejoice in the Lord's sovereignty, as Paul did. "Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ" (**Philippians 1:12-13**).

And those troublemakers in the church? Those who preached out of "envy and rivalry" (**v. 15**)? Their selfish motives were no match for the sovereignty of Jesus. "Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice" (**Philippians 1:18 NLT**).

To read Paul is to read the words of a man who, in the innermost part of his being, believed in the steady hand of a good God. He was protected by God's strength, preserved by God's love. He lived beneath the shadow of God's wings. Do You?

Stabilize your soul with the sovereignty of God. He reigns supreme over every detail of the universe. "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord" (**Proverbs 21:30**). He sustains "all things by his powerful word" (**Hebrews 1:3**). He can "whistle for flies from the Nile delta in Egypt" (**Isaiah 7:18**). He names the stars and knows the sparrows. Great and small, from People's Liberation Army of China to the army ants in my backyard, everything is under His control. "Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the most High that both calamities and good things come?" (**Lamentations 3:37-38**).

God's answer for troubled times has always been the same; heaven has an occupied throne. (From *Anxious for Nothing* by Max Lucado).

REACTION

7. How does understanding God's sovereignty help you to view seemingly out-of-control situations in your life?

Life Lessons from Philippians, Max Lucado, Author, Thomas Nelson, Inc; Philippians, MacArthur Bible Studies, John MacArthur, Author, Thomas Nelson, Inc; King James Open Bible, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

8. How might God be wanting to work through the bad situations in your life just now for his glory and your good?
9. In what areas of your life do you need to completely relinquish control to God?
10. Paul provides good principle in this passage about the possible wrong motives of others. What are some common wrong motives that Christians have for praying, witnessing to others, attending worship, giving to others and the like?
11. Paul was passionate about advancing the gospel of Christ. What would those who know you best say is your driving desire in life?
12. When you look at how you tend to respond to adversity, would you say your example is an encouragement or discouragement to others? Why?

LIFE LESSONS

Let's be honest...control is an illusion. We can't engineer our own problem-free lives, and we can't make others live the way we want them to live. About the only thing we can control is our response to situations. Will we look for God in the midst of trouble? Will we trust He is at work? Will we keep doing right no matter what? Paul is a great role model for us. He absolutely refused to pursue his own agenda because he saw himself as a mere servant of Christ. He made plans, but he held them in an open hand. When hard times came, his response wasn't to pout but to yield to God's authority by humbly saying, "Your will be done."

DEVOTION

Lord, we are often guilty of desiring our own will more than your plans and purposes. As a result, we get frustrated when things don't go our way. Teach us the art of surrendering to your bigger and better purposes. Show us how to experience triumph even in times of trouble.

JOURNALING

Review a past trial or hardship you experienced. What are some positive that came from it?

Next Week: Lesson Three: Standing Firm—**Philippians 1:19-30**