



Study 7: What Has Happened to Me

Philippians 1:12-18a

Fellowship in the Spirit Phil. 2:1

Share an experience that you anticipated not going well, but actually turned out better than expected.

(i.e. a substituted ingredient that actually improved the recipe, a dinner party that resulted in a new friend, a conversation with your boss that actually led to a promotion)

Encouragement in Christ Phil. 2:1

We invite you to be still, give thanks, write a prayer, or release any concerns to Jesus.

Paul's joy stems from his perspective—his ability to see every pirouette both for its own beauty and for its place in the whole dance.

Gordon D. Fee

From the moment you go to prison you must put your cozy past firmly behind you...From today on, my body is useless and alien to me. Only my spirit and my conscience remain precious and important to me.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*

Holding Firm to the Word of Life Phil. 2:16

Philippians 1:12-18a

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually advanced the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard, and to everyone else, that my imprisonment is because I am in Christ. ¹⁴ Most of the brothers have gained confidence in the Lord from my imprisonment and dare even more to speak the word fearlessly. ¹⁵ To be sure, some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. ¹⁶ These preach out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷ the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What does it matter? Only that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice...

Growing in Knowledge Phil. 1:8

Paul's letter is a thank you note of sorts to the church at Philippi for their financial and other gifts sustaining him, but there are other reasons for Paul's letter. How might this church be concerned for their dear friend in prison? With such affection for the Philippians, Paul's assurance of God's faithfulness would be a precious gift to them.

A theme of this letter is "joy". The words "joy" or "rejoice" occur more than 12 times in this short letter! Paul is gracious, kind, and thankful, and communicates his warm heart and deep love for the Philippians. Far from complaining about his circumstances, he teaches, challenges, and inspires his followers. Indeed, Paul is living the life in Christ he wants them to live, partaking of grace and abounding in love. Lynn Cohick says it this way: Paul "resizes the characters of the story, making himself small and Christ's gospel big and tall, worthy of full attention." Let's dive in together to discover Paul's reason for rejoicing!

Dwell on These Things Phil. 4:8

If there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things...

And the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4:8-9

1. In verse 12, what is it Paul wants the brothers and sisters in Philippi to know?
 - a. Paul summarizes his recent past with the phrase “what has happened to me.” Recall what we know from previous studies about Paul. What are some things that “happened” to him?
 - b. When hard things happen in your life, what “story” do you first tell in response? Do you catastrophize, blame yourself, blame others, or something else? Share together.
2. Imagine what life was like for Paul: in prison and chained to a guard 24/7. What would that have been like? If that were you, what might you choose to be “writing home” about?
 - a. What do you think enables Paul to be focused on the spread of the gospel, rather than his own comfort?
 - b. The Greek noun used for “advance” in verse 12 is *prokopē*. In the ancient world, *prokopē* was used to describe an army or a group of pioneers chopping down dense forests or clearing away rough terrain to forge a new road where no one could previously pass. What is it like to picture the gospel moving in this way?
3. The Greek word for *gospel* is “euangelizo” - which means, “good tidings” or “good news.” What good news do you think Paul is talking about?
 - a. What does the word “gospel” mean to you? How would you put it in your own words?

- b. Why do you think the gospel, or good news, advances in the midst of hard circumstances?
 - c. How has it looked in your own life for the gospel to advance? Has it included hardship or suffering? Can you share an example?
- 4. In verse 13, Paul talks of the “imperial guard” who were members of the elite Praetorian Guard, soldiers who guarded the emperor – comparable to Secret Service and Navy Seals rolled into one! These are the guards chained to Paul at all times, changing shifts every 6 hours. According to this verse, what has happened because of Paul being guarded in prison?
 - a. What does Paul say about his imprisonment in verse 13? What (or who) is he in prison *for*?
 - b. How can it be “for Christ” that He is chained to a Roman guard and not allowed to go anywhere?
 - c. Consider your own places where you have suffered, or felt impeded. What difference does it make when you think of Jesus Christ being connected to your struggle? How does it change the way we endure trials if we consider that it is “for Christ”?
- 5. In verse 14, how does Paul describe the impact of his imprisonment on the brothers and sisters?
 - a. Why do you think they gained confidence? How might that be?
 - b. What difference does it make to be confident “in the Lord”? How do you think that kind of confidence impacts our attitude, language, or actions?
- 6. In verse 15-17, those who preach Christ are described as being in one of two groups. What are they, and what are they motivated by?

- a. What might your reaction be to someone preaching Christ out of selfish ambition?
 - b. Notice how much tension is present in the advancing of the gospel! Do Paul's comments about these groups who "preach Christ" challenge you in any way? Share together.
7. According to verse 18, in what does Paul find his greatest source of joy?
- a. Paul's attitude reflects earlier biblical stories and an ancient biblical theme. In Genesis 50:20, after being thrown in a pit, sold into slavery, and imprisoned for years, Joseph tells his brothers, "**You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.**" How does the pattern of God working through, not just around, suffering give you a different way to consider your own story?
 - b. Does Paul's example give you pause about any aspect of your life? Does this biblical paradigm challenge the way you are interpreting or responding to some aspect of your life? How so?
 - c. Reflect on ways Jesus Christ might be advancing the gospel in your life. Do Paul's words to the Philippians encourage or challenge you in any way? Share around your table.



Praying with Joy Phil. 1:4

Please join us in praying together Philippians 4:4-7 in **BOLD**.

Use the pause after each prayer to pray silently, even writing your prayers.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Practice Rejoicing! The Lord is near you right now.

Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Practice presenting your requests to God. What are they?

Practice thanking God. For what?

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

You are guarded and safe in God's peace! You can rest in it.

Let the glory of the Lord endure forever

Let the Lord be glad in His works.

I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.

Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things. Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. *Amen.* Philippians 4:8-9