

Lift Up The Gospel  
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Philippians 1:12-26

“Why, God? Why?” It is perhaps the most difficult question any Christian faces.

“Why this terrible tragedy?”

“Why this senseless crime?”

“Why cancer?”

“Why did I lose my job?”

“Why did I lose my home?”

“Why was my child born with a terrible handicap?”

“Why did they have to die so young?”

“Why am I chained to this wheel chair...these blind eyes...this debilitating illness?”

“Why, God? Why?”

And it leads a person of FAITH to another question:

“How will God use this for MY GOOD and HIS GLORY?”

In today’s scripture, Paul talks about his own difficult circumstances and gives us a BIG PICTURE perspective on HOW GOD USES DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES to MAGNIFY CHRIST and ADVANCE the Gospel.

Statement:

The CLEAREST and LOUDEST testimony a Christian can share is WHAT PEOPLE OBSERVE IN HOW WE RESPOND TO DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES.

I posed this question to all our care groups the question:

How have we seen God use DIFFICULT and TRAGIC CIRCUMSTANCES to MAGNIFY CHRIST and ADVANCE the Gospel?

Care Group Responses

Philippians 1:12-14

Paul’s Chains Advance the Gospel

12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters,[a] that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard[b] and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

- Verse 12: Paul uses the term: “what has happened to me” has advanced the Gospel. Let’s be clear about “what happened to Paul”
- Acts 21:17-28:31 gives us a rundown:

- Paul was illegally ARRESTED in the temple in Jerusalem
- Accused of bringing a Gentile into the temple
- When he was arrested the crowd was so violent in trying to kill him, Roman soldiers had to “carry him” into the barracks to escape the crowd.
- He was imprisoned in Caesarea for TWO YEARS
- He appealed to Caesar as a ROMAN CITIZEN and was moved to Rome for TRIAL
- What happened on the way to Rome? Shipwrecked!
- Three months waiting on the ISLAND OF MALTA.
- Finally to Rome and now he is in prison.

Warren Wiersbe writes:

*To many, all this would have looked like a failure, but not to this man with a “single mind,” concerned with sharing Christ and the gospel. Paul did not find his joy in ideal circumstances; he found his joy in winning others to Christ. And if his circumstances promoted the furtherance of the gospel that was all that mattered!*

- How did his being in prison FURTHER the Gospel?
- He was Chained 24/7 to Roman guards. Not JUST ANY GUARDS...the most elite... “imperial guard” of Caesar. A new guard every six hours. Four guards a day to witness to. To hear him praying. To tell the others in the imperial guard.
- His imprisonment made OTHER BELIEVERS in Rome, EMBOLDENED to talk about THE CAUSE OF CHRIST regarding Paul’s situation.
- Not preaching but CONVERSATION.
- The highest ranking people in Caesar’s government would have been debating Christ and Christianity in preparing for Paul’s trial.
- Paul’s CHAINS advanced the gospel because:

God uses DIFFICULT and TRAGIC CIRCUMSTANCES to MAGNIFY CHRIST and ADVANCE the Gospel.

The CLEAREST and LOUDEST testimony a Christian can share is WHAT PEOPLE OBSERVE IN HOW WE RESPOND TO DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES.

- Not only was Paul CHAINED...he was also CRITICIZED

Philippians 1:15-18a

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.

16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 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.

- Paul’s IMPRISONMENT led to lots of PREACHING by others!
- Look verses 15-18: What were the various MOTIVES of these other preachers?

- Some had “proper motives” and preached out of GOODWILL
  - Then OTHERS had “SELFISH MOTIVES”
  - Look at verse 16...who has it in the King James? “They preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds.”
  - That word CONTENTION mean “to canvass for office, to get people to support you.”
  - They preached TRUE GOSPEL but their motive was HURTING and EMBARRASSING PAUL and MAKING A NAME FOR THEMSELVES.
- How does Paul respond to all this in verse 18? SO WHAT? WHO CARES?
  - In other places in scripture Paul took on those who criticized him but here he just says “If the Gospel is being advanced. WHO CARES?”
  - Sometimes we’re CRITICIZED for doing what’s right. But God can even use CRITICISM by others to advance the Gospel.
  - Paul said, “Go ahead and RUN ME DOWN...I’ll JUST REJOICE!”

#### Philippians 1:18b-20

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.[a] 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

- Verse 19: How does Paul say all this will turn out? For my DELIVERANCE.
- Let’s look at that word DELIVERANCE. What do you think he means?
- Could be DELIVERANCE from prison or DELIVERANCE through death.

#### Philippians 1:21-26

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

- What do we mean by the expression: “A WIN-WIN situation?”

The Christian life is the ULTIMATE WIN-WIN situation! Whether ALIVE to serve or AT HOME with Christ...WE WIN!

- Paul says: “If I stay here and serve...that’s a GOOD THING!”
- Or, “If I die I get to be with Christ and relieved of all my suffering...a GREAT THING!”

#### 1 Corinthians 2:9 (King James Version)

9But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

- Paul said: “Sometimes I’m undecided...which would be better?”
- But that’s up to God.
- Either way...I WIN and He is GLORIFIED!

The IVP Commentary states:

*It would be easy to dismiss this passage (vv. 12-18) as Paul's simply putting the best possible face on a bad situation. But that would be to miss too much. Paul can write things like this because, first, his theology is in good order.*

They bring out THREE KEY POINTS of this THEOLOGY:

1. Paul looked at everything in light of the “bigger picture” of Calvary and in that picture *there is nothing that does not fit, even if it means suffering and death on the way to resurrection*
2. *...and related to the first, Paul is a man of a single passion: Christ and the gospel. Everything is to be seen and done in light of Christ.*
3. *Paul's passion for Christ has led him to an understanding ... Discipleship... means to participate in the sufferings of Christ (3:10-11), to be ready to be poured out as a drink offering in ministry for the sake of others (2:17). Paul's imprisonment belongs to those trials for which "we were destined" (1 Thess 3:3) and thus come as no surprise.*

Paul knew:

God uses DIFFICULT and TRAGIC CIRCUMSTANCES to MAGNIFY CHRIST and ADVANCE the Gospel.

That takes us back to our question of “WHY God? Why?”

- Why did Joni Eareckson Tada have a diving accident making her a quadriplegic?
- How did God use it?
- Why did Adrian Rogers get to his golden years set to train young preachers, and yet God said “no” and he died of cancer?
- How did God use it?
- Why do servants like Billy and Ruth Graham have to end their FRUITFUL lives in pain and suffering? We’ve asked that question at OUR HOUSE recently.
- Why did God allow Jim Elliott and his fellow missionaries to the Auca Indians be slain in 1956?
- How did God use it?

Ken Sande in his book, *The Peacemaker* shares these thoughts about Jim and Elisabeth Elliot.

Elisabeth was deeply grieved by the loss of her husband, and she had to wrestle through many unanswered questions. As this excerpt from her subsequent book reveals, however, she continued to trust in the sovereignty of God: To the world at large this was a sad waste of five young lives. But God has his plan and purpose in all things. . . . The prayers of the widows themselves are for the Aucas. We look forward to the day when these savages will join us in Christian praise. Plans were promptly formulated for continuing the work of the martyrs.

The widows carried on the work their husbands had begun; three years after the killings, God answered their prayers and began to open Auca hearts to the gospel. Even some of the men who had killed the five missionaries eventually came to Christ. Although Elisabeth praised God for the conversions he brought about, she acknowledged that they were not the sole measure of God's purpose in her husband's death. In 1981 she added an epilogue to her book, which included these words:

The Auca story . . . has pointed to one thing: God is God. If he is God, he is worthy of my worship, and my service. I will find rest nowhere but in his will, and that will is infinitely, immeasurably, un speakably beyond my largest notions of what he is up to. God is the God of human history, and he is at work continuously, mysteriously, accomplishing his eternal purposes in us, through us, for us, and in spite of us. ... Cause and effect are in God's hands. Is it not the part of faith simply to let them rest there? God is God. I dethrone him in my heart if I demand that he act in ways that satisfy my idea of justice...The one who laid the earth's foundations and settled its dimensions knows where the lines are drawn. He gives all the light we need for trust and obedience.

**Are you “chained” to some situation? Have you asked God to USE that situation (AS PAINFUL AS IT IS) to GLORIFY HIMSELF and to FURTHER THE GOSPEL?**

**That’s THE TAKEAWAY:**

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