

Joy of Adversity
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Philippians 1:12-26

Opening: Do you know the business term, “golden handcuffs?” What does it mean? Some people stay put for the financial payoff but they feel trapped in a job they hate. They might stay out of necessity but become bitter about it.

The Apostle Paul had a different set of “golden handcuffs” as he wrote this letter to the church in Philippi. When Paul said, “I am in chains because of Christ”ⁱ it wasn’t a metaphor. Paul was literally chained to a Roman soldier waiting for his day in court before Caesar. We know that Paul wasn’t under arrest for a crime. He was under arrest for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Instead of focusing on the oppression Paul saw the opportunity. Instead of being bitter Paul wrote, “...*what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel...*”ⁱ He knew God would turn his chains into “golden handcuffs” for the gospel!

We can feel trapped in the chains of difficult situations. For some the chains are illness, injury, or physical limitations. For some the chains are persecution for their faith, financial setbacks, or family conflict. For some it’s the chains of caregiving. Sometimes, even the daily load of working for a living and raising kids, though rewarding in the end, can feel like a grind at times; like chains.

Here’s the truth that should change us: Though we may sometimes feel trapped in adversity, God can use our “chains” to reach others with the good news of Jesus. Like Paul, instead of being bitter we can rejoice in that fact!

Philippians 1:12–26 (ESV) — 12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, **13** so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. **14** And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. **15**

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. **16** The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. **17** The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. **18** What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, **19** for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, **20** as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. **21** For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. **22** If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. **23** I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. **24** But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. **25** Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, **26** so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

- We hear of prisoners wearing an ankle monitor under house arrest.
- The ankle monitor keeps you from going “off property.” What are some other situations in life that might make someone feel as trapped as that?
- Caesar’s Praetorian Guard had a low tech but effective ancient version of the ankle monitor. Even under house arrest in Rome, scholars believe he was chained to a rotating shift of Roman soldiers. The NASB renders verse 13: *...my^a imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else...*ⁱⁱⁱ
- Paul’s guards didn’t have “earbuds” and an iPhone! As visitors came and went, the soldiers saw and heard it all, every conversation, every testimony, every hymn, every prayer. Talk about a “captive audience!”
- Paul’s captors and his friends alike were watching his response to his situation closely. When followers of Christ are trapped in adversity, how they respond can either advance or hinder the cause of the gospel.

- How many times have we left a visit with a saint who is in the chains of adversity and they had encouraged US more than we encouraged THEM?
- Paul's conduct was also encouraging evangelism. *"If Paul can be this bold sharing the gospel in these chains, we can confidently share it out here!"*
- Christ-followers can have a great ministry even while trapped by adversity.
- Let's talk about a sad reality within the family of God. Look at verse 15.
- Doing your best to further the message of the gospel can attract some enemies even within the church. Some other preachers were whispering, *"If Paul is a great preacher, it's interesting that God let them lock him up."*
- Paul shows an amazing, Christ-like attitude about this. He said, *"Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice."*^{iv}
- Vance Havner said, *"A preacher should have the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the hide of a rhinoceros. His problem is how to toughen his hide without hardening his heart."*^v
- That lesson is not just for preachers, it applies to laypeople too! Sadly, there are those in the church who will attack your efforts if your ministry work seems to be stealing their "spotlight." Let Jesus take care of them!
- It's one thing to shrug off the criticism of rivals, but Paul's case before Caesar carried the real threat of execution. It was a life or death situation.
- Verses 21-25 are some of the most challenging thoughts on death in scripture. Paul positions living or dying as the ultimate "win/win" situation:

²¹ For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.

²² But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. ²³ I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. ²⁴ But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. ^{vi}

- If I was under threat of execution I think I'd be freaked out, wouldn't you?

- Paul wasn't freaked he was focused. He wasn't freaked out about whether he would live or die; he was focused on advancing the gospel message.
- If I live longer I can do more for Christ, that's a WIN! If I die I get to spend eternity with Christ, that's a BIGGER WIN! I win either way!
- Only a truly saved follower of Christ can have that attitude!
- What an encouragement these verses must be for someone who is battling the chains of a terminal illness. What a motivation for all of us to make the most of the days we have for the cause of Christ!
- We know Paul was ultimately martyred, but he would live on for a while.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- While imprisoned for his faith, Paul didn't focus on the oppression. He focused on the opportunity of his "chains." He wrote, "...*what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel...*"^{vii}
- How do we apply this to you and me this week?
- As long as we are breathing air, there will be times when we are bound in the chains of adversity. If we'll trust Him, God can turn our chains of adversity into a place of ministry. Trusting Him is the key.
- Do you feel chained in the role of parent? What a place of ministry!
- Do you feel chained to a dead-end job? How will God use you there?
- Do you feel chained in the role of caregiver? What a ministry opportunity!
- Do you feel chained in the grip of illness? God can use that too!
- I couldn't help but think of Joni Eareckson Tada. Had she not had that devastating injury, the world would have been deprived of over four decades of amazing ministry as God has used her "chains" for His Glory.
- Joni shared a story [*"This is my wheelchair!" "That's the first time you've called it 'my wheelchair.' Thank you for owning your weakness."*]

- Listen to this quote from Joni: *“From then on out I realized my weakness wasn’t something to be embarrassed about but something to own and (the Bible says) to boast in, because when we are weak then He is strong...that’s been the theme of my life since.”*^{viii}
- Are you going through a season of adversity that feels like a prison?
- Though we may sometimes feel trapped in the chains of adversity, if we will trust Him, God can use our “chains” to reach others with the good news of Jesus and like Paul, we can rejoice in that!

ⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Php

ⁱⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 1:12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

ⁱⁱⁱ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 update](#). (1995). (Php 1:13). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

^{iv} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Php 1:18). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^v <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1184791>

^{vi} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Php 1:21–24). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{vii} [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 1:12). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{viii} Chuck Swindoll Interview with Joni
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CGdWg7hWT4>