

Seeing Opportunity in Your Trials Philippians 1:12-18

Introduction:

1. The apostle Paul dreamed of one day getting to go to Rome with the gospel of Jesus Christ (**Romans 1:13**). Life doesn't always work out the way we plan. Paul thought he would be going as a **preacher**, but instead he went as a **prisoner**.
2. Paul was illegally arrested, falsely accused, and unlawfully jailed, basically because he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why he calls them my chains **in Christ**. They were there because of his stand for Christ, and he wasn't ashamed of this. vs. 13
3. He appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome where he was under house arrest, chained to a Roman guard 24 hours a day, while waiting for his trial.
4. It was from this context that he wrote to the Philippian church. Paul makes it clear that he was not looking for pity. vs. 12
 - "Don't feel bad for me. These chains around my wrist, God is actually using them for good and giving me opportunities that I wouldn't have without them."
 - Satan thought he won a big battle when he induced the angry mob to arrest and jail Paul. But little did he know that Paul's chains would give him opportunity to impact this world in an incredible way.
5. Our God can take trials that Satan means for harm and use them for His good and His glory. Life can throw you some curve balls: health problems, tragedies, financial reversals, accidents, the loss of a job, the loss of a loved one, etc.
6. These things can feel like chains that have you bound, but today I want you to see that there is divine opportunity in those chains.

Life's trials can give you an opportunity to witness to the lost. vs. 12-13

1. Paul's chains were somewhat longer than a modern handcuff. They were about 18 inches long. One end was attached to the prisoner's wrists, the other to the guard's. The chains were typically never removed from the prisoner.
 - Can you imagine being a Roman guard and being chained to the apostle Paul? I wonder what Paul talked about? I ask that question in jest.
2. It wasn't long before many of these soldiers began to trust Christ as their Savior. Paul was supposed to be captive to them. God made them captive to Paul.
 - Paul actually had the opportunity to penetrate Caesar's household with the gospel of Christ. 1:13, 4:22
3. Through Paul's chains, the gospel pioneered new ground where it had never been before. The word "furtherance" means "progress, advancement." The gospel of Christ had actually made progress and advanced because of Paul's chains.
4. Did you know that God can use your chains to do the same thing? Whatever trial you may be going through, ask yourself, "How can I use this to be a witness for Christ and impact lives?"
5. The trials of life are a powerful stage on which you can live out the reality of what it means to have Christ in your life.
6. Paul said, "Don't feel sorry for me. These chains have actually helped to further the gospel."

Life's trials can give you an opportunity to encourage other believers. vs. 14

1. Notice verse 14. The implication is that before Paul's imprisonment, believers were afraid or at least reluctant to share their faith. As they witnessed Paul's strong faith and determination, even while in chains, it gave them confidence and courage.
2. Seeing Paul and his boldness for Christ and his willingness to suffer for the gospel of Christ, lit a fire under the church and intensified their zeal. Courage is contagious. Others feed off of it. **Illustration:** Brett Favre
3. Christian, let me reiterate again. The trials of life are a powerful stage on which you can live out the reality of your faith in Christ. Not only does this impact lost souls, but it also gives great encouragement and exhortation to your fellow believers.
4. When other believers see you showing forth the peace of God and faith in God in the midst of problems, there is no way to tell you what that does for them.
5. When you are going through times of intense pain and suffering, the natural thing is to focus on **self**, have a pity party, blame God, and say, "Woe is me." This is such a huge discouragement to other believers and can lead to their faith being undermined.
6. But when you are at total peace, focusing on Jesus, and giving God glory, what an encouragement you are to others. Your test becomes a testimony to others.

Life's trials can give you an opportunity to demonstrate the joy of the Lord.

1. One of the most difficult, painful things a Christian will go through is when you are maligned, falsely accused, or criticized by a fellow believer. We expect this from unbelievers, but not from believers.
 - You've heard the expression, "Kicking them while they're down." That is exactly what some fellow believers were doing to Paul. vs. 15-17
2. There were preachers who were envious of Paul and his ministry. They were blasting him and trying to turn people against Paul.
 - Maybe they were saying that there was sin in his life and that is why he was in prison.
 - Maybe they were saying that he lacked faith or he would be released.
 - "He's in prison, we're free. That's proof that his spiritual powers are inferior to ours."
3. They thought that as Paul got word that they were spreading these things, that God was blessing their ministries and not his, and many of his disciples were now following them. They thought this would add affliction or distress to him. They thought it would eat him up and make him bitter.
4. But what was Paul's attitude in verse 18? His attitude was, "I know their hearts aren't right, but they are preaching Christ, so I rejoice." Paul was just happy and excited because Christ was being preached and talked about.
5. Nothing could take away Paul's joy. Not the chains of Rome and not even the more painful criticisms of fellow believers.
6. Did you know that joy is a gift from God to every believer? Nothing can take away your joy. It comes from God's Spirit that lives within you and isn't dependent on outward circumstances.

7. There is only one thing that takes away our joy - sin. When we choose to take on sinful attitudes of bitterness, fear, doubt, resentment, negativism, etc., we lose our joy.
 - When we begin to accuse the Lord and get angry with God and blame God, our joy is one of the first casualties.
8. Paul experienced sorrow, tears, hurt, grief, disappointment, suffering, pain, yet he never allowed circumstances to dictate his joy. He simply would not allow circumstances of life to come between him and his love for his Savior.
 - Paul was not going to allow himself to get bitter.
9. How about you, Christian? How is your joy? When you go through trials and problems, what an opportunity to demonstrate to others the unfailing joy of the Lord.