

**Big Idea:** God helps us find purpose in the mess

**Primary Scripture:** Philippians 1:12-18

**Supporting Scripture:** Romans 8:28; James 1:2-4

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**CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)**

- Have you ever had one of those days where *everything* goes wrong?
  - It starts with something small... your alarm doesn't go off.
  - So now you're rushing, which means you skip breakfast.
  - That means by second period you're starving and distracted.
  - And because you're distracted, you completely blank on the quiz you forgot to study for.
  - Which, by the way, you forgot to study for because you were so stressed about the thing with your friend group last night.
  - The thing where everyone made plans and somehow you were the only one who didn't get the invite.
  - One small problem snowballs into another, and before you know it, you're sitting there wondering how a Tuesday got so out of hand.
- But that's still the *manageable* kind of wrong.
- There's a whole other category. The kind that doesn't fix itself after one bad day or even one bad month.
  - Like, a situation going on in your family that you didn't choose and can't fix.
  - Or you got cut from the team you practiced and trained for years to make.
  - Maybe someone you trusted completely blindsided you, and you're still trying to figure out what to do with the fallout.
  - Maybe it's a diagnosis that changed the plans you had for your life.
  - Or it might be consequences from a mistake you can't undo, no matter how much you wish you could.
- When that stuff piles on, there are big questions that tend to creep in...
  - *What if there's no way forward? What if I'm just... stuck?*

- Here's what I want you to know. That feeling? It's *real*. And more people in this room are carrying it than you'd probably guess.
- Some of you are sitting with circumstances you didn't choose. Things that showed up in your life before you had any say in the matter.
  - When you're in that place, it can start to feel like your whole life is on hold until things get better. Like you're in some kind of waiting room, just sitting there, hoping something changes so you can finally move on and actually start living.
- But what if that's not how it works? What if God doesn't wait for your circumstances to improve before giving you purpose?
- That question is the whole point of the series we're starting today. It's called ***Get Real***.
  - Over the next four weeks, we're going to explore how the Apostle Paul wrote about purpose, relationships, priorities, and focus.
- But let me tell you what makes this one different from anything else Paul ever wrote...
- Actually... you're going to have to trust me on that for just a second.
- Because once we get into it, I think it's going to completely change the way you think about your own circumstances.

### **SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)**

- Paul is kind of a big deal.
  - He planted churches all over the Roman Empire. He wrote letters that became Scripture. He stood in front of kings and governors and didn't flinch.
  - When Paul spoke, people listened. When Paul wrote, churches took notes.
  - This is not a guy whose opinion you ignored. This is not someone you wrote off.
- The church in Philippi had a real history with him. He had loved them, invested in them, supported them, and they supported him back financially when no other church would.
  - This letter is partly his way of saying *thank you*.
  - It's warm. It's joyful. It's full of gratitude and affection for the people he's writing to.

- Now... here's the thing about this letter that you need to know before we read it.
  - Paul wrote it... **from prison**.
  - He was waiting to find out if he was going to be executed.

*<sup>12</sup> And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. <sup>13</sup> For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. (Philippians 1:12-14 – NLT)*

- This wasn't just some random group of soldiers. This was Caesar's personal security detail, the most elite military unit in the Roman Empire.
- These were people who had no reason to ever hear about Jesus. And because Paul was chained to them... one by one, they did.
- His chains didn't stop the gospel. They redirected it somewhere it never would have gone otherwise.

*<sup>15</sup> It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. <sup>16</sup> They preach because they love me, for they know I have been appointed to defend the Good News. <sup>17</sup> Those others do not have pure motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. <sup>18</sup> But that doesn't matter. 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 1:15-18 – NLT)*

- Not only is Paul in chains, but some people are using his imprisonment as an opportunity to make things worse for him.
  - The idea was that if the movement grew while Paul was locked up and unable to lead it, it would sting. Like watching someone else step into your role while you're stuck on the sidelines with no way to respond.
  - His response? *Fine. Christ is being preached, and that's what matters.*
    - Most of us, if someone was weaponizing our pain against us, would have a very different response.

- What does Paul know that makes him capable of responding like that?

## **INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)**

### **1. Your circumstances don't limit God.**

- Paul couldn't travel. He couldn't preach freely. He couldn't do what he was known for.
  - Because of that, God moved in a direction that never would have opened up otherwise.
- Have you ever lost something and it felt like a door closing... but it turned out to be a redirection?
- That's what's happening to Paul. The chains didn't stop God. They just changed the route.

***<sup>28</sup> And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. (Romans 8:28 – NLT)***

- Whatever you're carrying right now might be exactly where God is working.

### **2. God can use people who aren't even on your side.**

- There's a famous story about a woman named Corrie ten Boom, whose family hid Jewish people in their home during World War II.
  - She was eventually caught and sent to a Nazi concentration camp.
  - From inside that camp, she watched God move in ways that made no sense given the circumstances.
    - Guards who were supposed to be cruel ended up looking the other way. A Bible that should have been confiscated somehow made it through every inspection. Things that had no business going right kept going right.
  - Corrie later said, "*There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still.*"
- Paul learned to hold his circumstances loosely because he knew who was running things.
- If God can spread the gospel even through people with bad motives, then Paul doesn't need to waste energy on what he can't control.

### 3. Purpose is bigger than comfort.

- We tend to think of purpose as something we'll get to eventually. Once life settles down. Once we figure out who we are. Once the messy stuff gets cleaned up.
- If someone took away everything you're comfortable with... your routine, your friend group, your plans... what would be left? What would still be driving you?

*<sup>2</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. <sup>3</sup> For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. <sup>4</sup> So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. (James 1:2-4 – NLT)*

- God isn't waiting for your life to calm down before He can use it. He's already at work in the middle of it.
- The question isn't whether He can use your situation. The question is whether you're willing to let Him.

### **ACTION (How could we live this out?)**

#### 1. Choose mission over comfort.

- This week, think of one thing you know you should do but have been putting off because it feels uncomfortable.
- Whatever it is, do that thing.
- If you're not sure where to start, just ask God to show you.
- Sometimes we already know what it is, we just need to stop waiting for it to feel easier and take the first step.

#### 2. Ask God to use the mess.

- Write down one specific difficult thing you're facing right now.
  - Ask God one question about it: "How might You want to use this situation to make Jesus known?"
- If that feels like a stretch right now, that's okay, you don't have to have it figured out.
  - Just write it down and ask the question.
- Paul didn't go looking for a ministry opportunity in prison. He just stayed open, and God moved.

### **3. When God shows up, tell somebody.**

- This week, when you see God at work in your situation, even in a small way, tell someone.
- The more specific you are, the more real it becomes for you and for whoever hears it.
- If you're not sure who to tell, start with someone in this room tonight.
  - Your small group is literally designed for this.
- You just have to be willing to be honest about what you're seeing God do, even if it's small.