

WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?
Perspective
Philippians 1:1-19

Life is filled with problems. Everybody's got some. Some people have more than others. So, what's YOUR problem? Are you going through some sort of FINANCIAL trial? Are you facing a PHYSICAL battle with your HEALTH? Are you dealing with some devastating RELATIONAL loss? While some of you might answer that question with a frightening list of financial, relational, or physical issues, your real problem might not be what you think! **It may be that your biggest PROBLEM is not REALLY your BIGGEST problem!** Many people live buried beneath their problems, and they stay depressed and discouraged because they feel that there is no way that they can get out from "under the circumstances!" They feel CHAINED to their circumstances. Is that You? If so, you need to know something very important. **Your biggest problem is NOT that you are chained to your circumstances; it is that you are chained to a GODLESS PERSPECTIVE of your circumstances! And your perspective determines your attitude and your behavior!** You make your problems even bigger when you make them your single focus. *You see, all of us have a decision to make about how we will VIEW our problems, and how we will RESPOND to our problems. This is the key, and it is not a matter of personality styles; it is a personal CHOICE. And no one else can make that choice for you!* It is time for us to learn a BETTER way to face our problems. In the little book of Philippians, we are going to learn some biblical principles about how – with God's help - we can CULTIVATE a godly perspective even when life is extremely difficult.

Today, I want us to begin by looking at the MODEL that the Apostle Paul gave to us about how we can put our problems into a proper biblical perspective so that God can bless and use us no matter what we may be going through. *Thankfully, Paul does not just teach us idealistic principles to help us accomplish this; he demonstrates them.* Paul's words are powerful because they are written from the context of his own experience of loss and religious persecution. *Paul wrote this letter to the church at Philippi while he was in PRISON. He was literally CHAINED to a Roman guard while he was putting his thoughts down on parchment. But Paul was NOT chained to his circumstances.* I want to let him tell you what he was actually chained to when he wrote this letter: **Philippians 1:1 NLT**

1 This letter is from Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. I am writing to all of God's holy people in Philippi who belong to Christ Jesus, including the elders and deacons.

Did you catch it? Paul was not enslaved by the religious Jews that sent him in chains to Rome because of his refusal to stop preaching in the name of Christ. Nor was he simply bound in chains by the godless Roman political machine that accused him of rebellion against the Roman government. **Before Paul was ever a prisoner of the**

Jews or of Rome, he was a bond-slave of Jesus Christ! This was his perspective on his present troubles, and he wrote it down for all of us.

Paul had the perspective of a bond-slave who was devoted to doing the will of Christ.

The word that Paul uses in the verse is the word “Bond-Slave.” It is a word that refers to one who has willingly chosen to submit to the will and desires of another. A slave whose time of service was ended could go to his master and ask to have his ear pierced with an awl as a sign of his permanent commitment to serve him for the remainder of his life. This was how one became a bond-slave. It was a personal choice. A bond-slave was described as one who is “DEVOTED to another to the DISREGARD of his own interests.” That is a RADICAL commitment!

Now, Paul’s perspective as a bond-slave will lead to the discovery of Paul’s SECRET treasure. It is the discovery of the very THEME of this entire little letter, which we will learn in just a moment. I promise, you will WANT this priceless treasure in your own life. But those who do not EMBRACE Paul’s perspective will never find Paul’s secret treasure! Let me ask you a question: **How serious are YOU about the will of Christ in your everyday life? When was the last time that you chose to do his will in your financial, sexual, relational, or business activities?** The perspective of Paul is NOT just a mindset for preachers and missionaries! It is for ALL of the Saints! (Yes, that means YOU!) **And it is not one that we can apply selectively or that we will somehow just express spontaneously when we need it. It must be CULTIVATED by comprehensive PRACTICE in our everyday lives.** Start today. Are you a BOND-SLAVE of Jesus Christ? Do you TRUST his will even when it involves setbacks, troubles, and disappointments? Paul did; and it led him to a remarkable, unexpected REWARD. That reward is the THEME of this letter.

Paul’s perspective freed him to experience the joy of the Lord.

You see, the THEME of this entire letter is the unbridled, overflowing JOY that is available in ALL circumstances to those who devote themselves to the will of God. **And that joy becomes further incentive for us to keep on trusting him in all circumstances. It is a CYCLE OF JOY.** The apostle Paul was not being flippant or deceitful when he wrote to them of his joy. It was the natural expression of his faith perspective. Paul spoke of his joy in every single chapter of this letter. He had joy in his friendships. He had joy in his prayers for the Philippians. He had joy about the spread of the Gospel, and thus he experienced joy even in his chains. He had joy in partnering with others for the spread of the Gospel. The list goes on throughout the entire letter. Paul was a joyful man. I agree with Kenneth Wuest that JOY is the “gigantic SECRET of the Christian life.” A joyful believer is a joy to be around. And a joyful believer has the strength to keep on going even when the going gets tough. This is why Nehemiah said, “The joy of the Lord is our STRENGTH!”

Would you like to have joy? Then it is time to CHANGE your perspective. I know that you cannot immediately change your circumstances, but you CAN and MUST change your perspective. And you must do it NOW! God's Word and God's Spirit will make this possible for you. **The KEY to changing your perspective is found in the FOCUS of your faith. You are going to have to trust something about God that will require genuine dependence; not just intellectual assent.** You will have to put your life on the line with the dependence that I am referring to; but it will result in a remarkable experience of joy.

A joyful perspective comes from reliance upon God's sovereignty.

Paul expressed this several times in this first chapter. Obviously, his choice to become a BOND-SLAVE of Jesus Christ is an indication that he had absolute confidence that Christ's will was far superior to his own. When the Spirit of the Lord spoke clearly to him, he trusted that the will of Jesus was the FINAL WORD. That is a decision that only he could make for himself. Paul also expressed this reliance upon God's sovereignty in a verse that became my LIFE VERSE when I was just a teenager. It has brought me great comfort and confident expectation about my future ever since I first discovered it. It has been my JOY! **Philippians 1:6 NLT**

6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete [it] until the day of Jesus Christ.

Paul believed that God would do this for the believers in Philippi because he was seeing God's sovereign faithfulness with him in his own life! **What are you absolutely confident about in your Christian faith concerning you?** Are you confident that Jesus will do everything good in you that he set out to do? I am, even when it seems that everything that I thought would go one way has ended up going another! **Nothing can derail the SOVEREIGN PURPOSES of God in my life. Nothing.** God began a good work in me when I was 15 years old, and he is still bringing that work toward its divine goal. I am so grateful for his patience and his loving-kindness! Paul was my mentor in this discovery.

Paul had learned the truth that sometimes you cannot change the things in or around you that you would most like to change. Sometimes the prison doors will not open. Sometimes the physical illness will not go away. Sometimes the persecution will grow MORE intense. What then? Has God lost his power, or is something else at work? You see, Paul did not live in denial about the hard things in life. He faced more than most (shall I say ALL) of us will ever face. Listen to the list of troubles that Paul faced even before he spent years in prison chained to a guard.

2 Corinthians 11:24-28 NLT

24 Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. 26 I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people,

the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. 27 I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. 28 Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.

How could a man who faced troubles like that ever laugh or have any joy? Yet, this man was FULL of joy in his life. His letters resounded with expressions of gratitude and delight. The Lord taught Paul this lesson early on when he experienced an illness of some sort that God chose NOT to heal for him. Christ made it clear to him that there was a greater work that God wanted to do through him that would increase the spirit of DEPENDENCE and HUMILITY that Paul needed. In 2nd Corinthians, Paul stated that he begged God on three separate occasions to take this "thorn in his flesh" from him. Christ gave him GRACE through the gift of "NO."

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NLT

9 Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. 10 That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul accepted this, and it led him to unspeakable joy. God's grace can do the same thing for you and me. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he made it clear that God was using the troubles that he was facing for eternal purposes. Here again is evidence of Paul's confidence in God's sovereignty. **Philippians 1:12-14 NLT**

12 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. 13 For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. 14 And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear.

Paul made it a point to LOOK for the good that was coming out of his troubles. We too often forget to DO this ourselves. Paul saw that his imprisonment was helping to spread the Gospel. This was Paul's purpose, and this was Paul's joy. Everyone in Nero's palace guard knew that Paul was in prison not because of crime, but because of Jesus Christ. This is how God used the early church to "turn the world upside down!" Imagine being one of the guards that was chained to Paul! Do you think that he heard the Gospel? One of the last things that Paul says in this letter refers to that: **Philippians 4:22 NLT**

22 And all the rest of God's people send you greetings, too, especially those in Caesar's household.

Can't you just see a smile spreading across Paul's face as he writes those final words in this letter? I can only imagine how much joy it brought him to send a greeting from one who had been chained to him as a guard, and from others in Caesar's Palace (not the one in Vegas!) who had turned their lives over to the Lord Jesus Christ! **Chuck Swindoll wrote:** "the most reliable scholarship suggests that it [Caesar's Palace] is a reference to an incredibly large body of people in Italy and the surrounding provinces, slaves and free citizens alike . . . members of the elite Imperial Guard that waited on Caesar, doing his special work. And we should not forget the network of executives and administrators, secretaries and courtiers in and about Caesar's royal palace. Legend even has it that Nero's own wife heard the Gospel message when he was out of town and turned her life over to Christ!"
[\[Laugh Again – P. 234, 235\]](#)

Don't be afraid of how the church is going to fare in these days of change in the United States. God's church will prevail because God is sovereign and his people are committed to his will . . . even when it means that they will suffer! **Have you seen anyone who is "chained to you in your suffering" come to Christ because of the witness of your faith?** May it be so!

Not only that, Paul said that other believers were growing bolder in their witness because they saw how Paul was prospering even in prison. Along with that however, Paul was facing trouble from other believers who were preaching the Gospel as some sort of competition against him (1:15,17). They were attempting to somehow discredit or hurt him, but Paul refused to be focused on his own fame. He was just thrilled that Christ was being preached, no matter what their motives. **He was able to combat that spirit of jealousy and selfish ambition with – you guessed it – JOY! Philippians 1:18 NLT**

18 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.

Christian, it is time for you to develop a perspective that will lead you to joy. I am so saddened when I hear of people who abandon their faith in order to chase after happiness. I see this in those who develop unholy discontent and bitterness about their lot in life. They make the mistake of striking out to CHANGE their own life by ungodly means. They abandon faith for flesh, they give themselves over to greed or sexual immorality, and they abandon all forms of covenant and commitment in favor of the FREE LIFE. Some find immediate RELIEF and become giddy in happiness for a time with their new reality. But it is always temporary. By its very nature, the happiness of sin in our broken world is a cheap imitation of joy that is based in

circumstances. That is far different than what Paul is demonstrating. We must not chase after happiness, but after the eternal, sovereign God.

What is your perspective about your present reality? Are you willing to trust God with your troubles and find your joy on HIS pathway? *Maybe you are wondering HOW you could possibly do this. Every message in this series will attempt to give you the answer to that question.* **But you will never even hear what is said if you do not take the time to EXAMINE your own perspective about your present life with Christ, and then bring it in line with God through FAITH.** Instead of obsessing about where you think that God is failing or forgetting you, open your heart and allow him to show you what he is REALLY up to in your life. I know that you will not be able to do this without stumbling and messing up, but I know that the One who holds you is greater than even your weakest moments and worst failings! If he is your Savior, He is GOING to ACCOMPLISH his will in you whether you LIKE IT or NOT. Why not choose to like it? So REALLY, what's your problem?

Let's pray.

