

Philippians 1:12-20 **Making The Best Of The Worst**

Anyone who lives long enough knows that no one makes it through this life without scars. We all go through difficult times, and they seem to take on familiar themes. Physical ailments in our lives or the lives of those we love, financial problems, relationship problems, work problems, or just getting worn down by the unchanging monotony of your life. Sooner or later, something, from some area of life, hits everyone.

How do we respond to it all? To use Biblical terms, there are really only two ways: in the flesh or in the Spirit.

What does that mean? To respond to something in the flesh is to be controlled by it, to go along with the emotional flow of it all; to become angry, or anxious, stressed out, or depressed; to spend all your time thinking about it, or dump money into trying to overcome it; bottom line: you don't control it, it controls you.

And there is something, some weak spot in every one of us where we can be poked – hard enough or long enough - and it's quite likely we'll respond in the flesh. It's our default reaction to things we can't control or which offend or bother us.

To respond in the Spirit on the other hand, is to respond in the strength of God in a way that pleases and best represents God.

So, when you hear bad news or something bad happens to you, do you panic or lash out, or do you pray? Do you respond in the flesh or in the Spirit?

Some of you already know this, but the same Paul that wrote Philippians also wrote about the tendency to respond in the flesh or in the Spirit – he talks about it in Galatians 5 where he tells us that if we “Walk in the Spirit, you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (vs 16). And tells us that walking in the Spirit produces fruit in our lives: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (vs 22-23). Now, I think that sounds like the kind of life we would like to live. And I know that's the kind of life that is pleasing to God, but how do we get there?

Well, this morning we are going to see that Paul actually practiced what he preached. Even though he is facing the very real possibility of the death sentence while in custody in Rome, he is very much at peace with his situation.

So we're going to take a look at what he was going through and we're going to see three keys that made it possible for him to have that peace, a peace that to use Biblical language again, “passes all understanding.”

[12](#) But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel,

What has happened? Paul is in Roman custody – he’s under house arrest awaiting trial before Caesar in Rome. His life and perhaps the Empire’s formal response to Christianity hang in the balance. But Paul says, “no big deal. Don’t stress out. It’s all going fine. The gospel – the good news about who Jesus is and what He has done - has been spread even further as a result of all this.”

OK, and that’s true. But don’t just gloss over the hard facts with a romantic view of Paul as the hero – realize, he really is chained to a Roman soldier – a member of the elite Praetorian Guard - day and night. He really is going to go and appear before the most powerful man in the world who might have gotten a bad night’s sleep the night before and be in a bad mood on the day Paul presents his case. There’s no guarantee of justice or fairness.

Paul is really facing life or death. But still, he’s not concerned, and he hasn’t been for a long time *because* he sees all the good in the situation:

[13](#) so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; [14](#) and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Paul recognized that the situation he was facing presented an opportunity for others to understand the gospel and that as he walked in the Spirit others were encouraged.

Well, most of them were:

[15](#) Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: [16](#) The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; [17](#) but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

Apparently there were two responses in the church to Paul’s situation. Everyone knew about it, everyone had an opinion on it; it was a big topic of conversation, especially for Christians in Rome. Some thought Paul was doing the right thing, that by appealing to have his case heard before Caesar he had made the right choice. But others were questioning his motives and his actions and they were speculating publicly about whether he was really as spiritual as he said he was. They were questioning whether God had really led him to do all of this, and as a result, whether God would really deliver him from all of this. They were those who were preaching out of envy and strife. They were preaching the true gospel, preaching salvation through Christ, but they were preaching with selfish ambition, giving their personal take on the issues as they preached.

Fortunately, there were also some who were standing with Paul, encouraging him as he awaited trial, and doing their best to explain to anyone who asked why he was locked up and what the big deal was about this crucified Jew named Jesus.

Paul knows all of this is going on. He knows people are out there questioning his name and his circumstances, and how does he respond to it?

18 What then? Only *that* in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

He really doesn't care. Much like his attitude toward being in chains, he says, "if it means that more people are hearing about Jesus, then it's OK with me."

And now, once again, don't just let that glaze over your hearts and mind because it's what you expect the Bible to say, or because you think you're so familiar with the storyline. Let this sink in and convict or condemn you as necessary.

Paul says, "**I don't care what happens to me, as long as Jesus is glorified.**" He is walking in the Spirit.

What about us? Is this the way we respond when trial and temptation or competition comes our way?

What kills me is that most of us, myself included, don't. We respond in the flesh. We complain, we gripe, we murmur, we talk to our friends or our spouses; we let people know we're being wronged. And maybe we even question whether God is good, or where He is if He is letting this happen to us.

But what if instead of doing that, we took on Paul's attitude? What if instead of stressing out, lashing out, or crying out, we took a minute and said, "nevertheless, not my will, but Thy will be done" and we offered up our hardships and difficulties to God as an act of worship?

What if we said, "Jesus, help me to use this situation, THIS ONE RIGHT HERE, to make You more known." More known to myself as I rely on You to get me through this, and more known to everyone else who is watching as I lean on You step by step, moment by moment to get through it all. What if instead of walking in the flesh I walked in the Spirit?

This is something I found myself crying out to God about this week. God, please give me this kind of response. God please help me to care more about You than I do about my own comfort. Because for too many of us, our comfort and being in control of our circumstances is more important than the gospel and the name of Jesus being glorified.

Right now, if you were asked, you could probably name at least one area of your life where this is going on. You know your triggers. Maybe you're walking through a situation in life right now that has you under control – you're bound up by it, focused on it, trying to conquer it in your own strength. Or you've got an uncovered chink in your armor and you're like the old Pillsbury Dough Boy – whenever the enemy or someone else wants to make you respond they just reach over and poke you – right there in your weak spot.

How do you get out of it? How do you move from being controlled to being in control? How do you move from walking in the flesh to walking in the Spirit? How do you go from caring about yourself to caring about Jesus?

Paul gives us three keys that help shelter us from the tendency to respond the wrong way.

[19](#) For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, [20](#) according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. [21](#) For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.

Three things – your prayer, the Holy Spirit, and my outlook. Let’s take a look at each of them.

Verse 19 is one of those verses that I just sit and stare at sometimes. I can’t believe what it says. It just hasn’t sunk down deep enough into my soul yet, or I’m somehow weak-minded or something, but I stare at those words “I know this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers” and I know there’s something there that I don’t fully understand.

It says, right there, that my life can be changed by others praying for me. But let’s look at this from the opposite side, it also means that my prayers can have an effect on the life of someone else. Now, I believe that, I practice that, I know people do it for me, but it still amazes me to see it in print – my prayers affect people’s lives.

Do you realize the privilege that affords you? It almost feels frightening. But it’s thrilling too. It’s even better when you realize that the Philippians were over 1300km away from Paul. They weren’t standing right there with him.

This means that you can pray for people who aren’t close to you physically, but who are dear to you spiritually and emotionally, and no matter how far away they are, you can know that your prayers can REALLY affect them!

If you really believe this, you’ll understand that you can do more *through prayer* for those you love and those you care about while you’re thousands of miles away than you could if you were standing right next to them and only helping physically.

This means you can pray for friends, for family members, for missionaries, for people who need to be saved and people who need to be encouraged, you can pray for your kids and for your parents, you can pray for your future spouse before you even meet them, and you can believe that it can all have a real, tangible, effect on their lives. It says so right here! This is an awesome privilege and I hope we take advantage of it. And of course, we hope that other people realize this and are praying for us, right?

The second key is the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ – the Holy Spirit, the One who Jesus promised in John 14:16-18:

“I will pray the Father and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

This is the most important of the three keys, because this one doesn't depend on other people, and it doesn't depend on us, it depends on Jesus. We may slip and stumble and forget to have the right perspective on our lives, but Jesus never fails. He promised the Holy Spirit to all of us who believe in Him and He doesn't fail to deliver.

Other people may let us down, they may forget to pray for us, just like we forget to pray for them. But according to Romans 8 Jesus and the Holy Spirit are always praying for us, and they are never going to forget or be too busy.

The Bible teaches that when you accept Christ as your Savior, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within you. And that He remains with you for the rest of your earthly life. He's the one telling you, “you shouldn't do that” or “you really should do that” and then giving you a supernatural ability to obey at times.

Now, yes, there are times when you ask for help and it doesn't seem like He's there. But you have to look at it like a coach helping athletes in the gym – if every time the weight got heavy you asked for a spot you'd never get any stronger. Sometimes we call out for God's help and He doesn't seem to answer, it's not because He's not there, it's because He is there, rooting for us, but wanting to see us grow stronger. He'll catch you if you fall, He won't let things get too far out of hand, but He's offering you a chance to grow by facing adversity.

And then there are other times when bad things do happen to us, like they are happening with Paul and we wonder, where are you God? At those moments, He's still rooting you on and cheering for you, wanting to see you make the right, and hard, choices. But for some reason, He's also letting evil people make their choices. The only way for God to keep every bad thing from entering your life would be to make it so that unrighteous people couldn't affect you. And what would that look like?

If someone was about to say something offensive to you would He just push the “beep” button and protect you from hearing it? It would be kind of strange. We all still have the ability to sin, and the ability to sin against other people, and that means sometimes we hurt each other. God sees that, and it grieves Him. But He doesn't always stop it, and that doesn't mean He isn't there - if you are a Christian you are guaranteed to be supplied with the Spirit. That doesn't mean you won't face hard times, it just means you won't face them alone.

Which brings us to our last key to walking in the Spirit – hope in God. Paul says in verse 20 that he has an “earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. [21](#) For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.”

Paul has the expectation and the hope that no matter how this all turns out, he will win.

We'll talk more about this next week, but Paul has this hope because his greatest ambition is to glorify God. Not to be comfortable, or feel rested and refreshed, not to be secure, not to have great benefits, his greatest ambition is to glorify Jesus.

And if that is what you are really concerned about, then no matter what comes your way, you can find a way to worship in the middle of it. And, in a very ironic kind of way, your worship becomes even more valuable. That was one of the issues in the book of Job – Job was a rich man, he had a big family, lots of property, lots of animals, and he loved God. But Satan came one day and told God, “You know, he only serves you because he has it easy. If his life wasn't so easy he'd turn his back on you.”

And so, in order to prove that Job's love for God was deeper than that, God allowed Satan to take away all the good stuff in Job's life. It got to the point where even Job's wife asked him, “Why don't you just curse God and die?” After all, death has to be better than what you are going through right now. But Job never did. He knew that God was good even when his situation wasn't. And the fact that he refused to turn from God, especially when life was rough, made his worship that much more valuable.

The problem we all have is that we're only focused on glorifying Jesus some of the time. In our best moments, in the times we're most proud of. But there are too many other moments when we slip and we focus on something else and then some difficulty or frustration comes along and because our eyes weren't on Jesus, we respond in the flesh.

It's the reality of every one of our lives. It's something we all have to continually work on. Fortunately, we're not in it alone. This isn't our problem, or our issue to work out. We have been given the Spirit of Jesus and there are people who can and do pray for us. Take that and combine it with your memories of all that God has already done for you, and hopefully it will be a little easier for us to keep our hope fixed on Him and to respond in the Spirit no matter how badly we're pricked, poked, or prodded.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you for the work that you have done in us. Thank you for all that You still promise to do.

Father thank you for caring about the difficulties in our lives, and thank You for not leaving us to face them alone.

Forgive us for walking in the flesh. Forgive us for our poor selfish responses to difficulty and trials. Help us to change, teach us to walk in the Spirit.

Thank you for the people who pray for us, please bless and encourage them, so that they might continue to pray for us and change our lives for the better.

And help us to see who You want us to pray for. Help us to see how our prayers really make a difference in their lives, and encourage us to continue in this privilege.

Thank you most of all for the gift of Your Son and Your Spirit. Please have your way in us and may even more of Your Spirit shine through and strengthen us as we face our trials.

Lord help us today and this week to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, help us cling to our hope in Him, and help us to change so we are not so easily distracted from focusing on Him.

We ask for these blessings and we give You these thanks, in Jesus' name. Amen.