

The Letter to the Philippians – Lesson 2
Philippians 1:12-21

Life is never perfect, and all of us must deal with the reality of suffering. Your heart may be heavy today; you may be weighed down by unexpected disappointments or fear for the future. This study is for you.

The Bible has words of comfort for us, and we can benefit greatly by understanding Paul's perspective on the suffering he was experiencing at the time he was writing this letter to the church at Philippi.

Paul's letter to the Philippians is best understood when we remember that it is a personal letter written for a specific purpose. The letter has a consistent tone, theme, and message. For this reason, please begin your study this week by reading all of chapter 1 of Philippians before you focus in on verses 12-21.

- 1. Observe Paul's account of his general circumstances as he is writing. Read the account of Paul's arrival in Rome in Acts 28:16-31.
 - a. From your reading of Philippians chapter 1, how would you describe Paul's tone and mood as he explains his circumstances?
 - b. What do you conclude about Paul's foremost priority in life?
 - c. What sense do you have of Paul's level of friendship with the believers in Philippi? Give some examples from chapter 1 that support your conclusion.

- 2. Read Philippians 1:12-18. Paul is in chains in Rome, awaiting trial.
 - a. Paul's purpose in verse 12-14 is to reassure and comfort his beloved friends who would have been distressed at the news of Paul's imprisonment. What is Paul's surprising claim in 1:12?
 - b. Paul argues that what appears to be a bad thing has actually turned out to be a good thing. How has Paul's imprisonment provided unexpected opportunity for the spread of the gospel? (1:13-14)

- c. Paul remained joyful in the midst of a long-term, unjust imprisonment. What lessons can you learn from Paul's attitude toward life and toward God? (1:18)
- d. *For personal reflection:* As we encounter disappointments and unexpected losses, we can look to God's goodness in the past in order to confirm our confidence that God has control of our future. Just as was true for Paul, there are times in our own lives when what appears to be a bad thing turns out to be a good thing. Has there been a time in your life when a disappointing circumstance has turned out to be a God-ordained situation that has brought greater blessing to you and your family? Share with your group if you feel comfortable doing so.

- 3. Read Philippians 1:19-21 Paul considers his future.
 - a. Paul is confined, but he has not been abandoned. What are the possible end results that Paul expects from his current circumstances? (1:19-20)
 - b. How does Paul summarize his attitude toward life and death in Phil. 1:21?
 - c. For personal reflection: As you look at Paul's response to his difficult circumstances, notice that his desire is more for character than comfort. His goal is Christ's glory rather than his own. As you consider the most difficult aspect of your life right now—whatever that may be for you—how might your perspective be different if your attitude were more like Paul's? How might a clearer view of God soften the impact of your difficult circumstances?

d. *For personal reflection:* Life is never perfect, but God is. The future may seem uncertain, but God is in control. The Bible presents a multi-faceted affirmation of the character and the good purpose of God. What have you learned from the Bible that gives you confidence that you are held firmly in God's loving arms?

Take a moment to pray, thanking God for His wisdom, His good purposes, and His personal care for you—every day, in every way. He loves you.