

REDEEMING THE DISRUPTION

Chances are decent that you're already familiar with parts of the book of Philippians... even if you've never read it. Coffee-mug quotes like, *I Can Do All Things, Forget What Lies Behind, Press on Toward the Goal, and Do Not be Anxious* are lifted directly from this letter written by the Apostle Paul. Ever since its first century origin, countless numbers have turned to it to find encouragement, hope, and strength. With such quotable inspiration from his pen, we could expect Paul to be crushing it—affluence, an enviable social life, and the kind of future that would let him call his own shots.

Surprisingly, what we see instead is a man in prison with little (earthly) certainty or control over what's ahead. Philippians, as much as any of the Bible's 66 books, reminds us over and over that *God's purposes are unfazed by life's circumstances*. In fact, the unplanned and undesirable situations we find ourselves in can be the exact vehicle God uses to accomplish His work.

Main Text: Acts 16 and Philippians 1:1-14

CONNECT

1. What took place this past week that was unplanned and maybe even undesirable? What was your reaction to it?
2. What did you take away from last Sunday's sermon? Was something especially significant, inspiring, confusing, or helpful?

LEARN & OBSERVE (read Acts 16 for background)

1. Read Philippians 1:1-11. Paul self-identifies himself and Timothy as "servants" or slaves of Jesus. What do you think this label means for them regarding their attitudes, decisions, and expectations in life?
2. What different phrases does Paul use to express his love and care for the Philippians in these first 11 verses?
3. Similar to the previous question, what phrases do you think the Philippians would find encouraging in these first 11 verses?

4. Read verses 12-14. We first heard about Paul's current imprisonment back in verse 7. What two main effects does he include in verses 13-14 for how his predicament has "really served to advance the gospel"?

APPLY

1. Think about Paul's title, *servant of Christ Jesus*. First, do you see this as the kind of title you would like to have? Second, if you do, what attitude, decision, or expectation would need to be adjusted or redirected in your life in order to live this out more?

2. Paul expresses an incredible affection for the church in Philippi even though he can't be physically present with any of them! What cues can we take from his actions and adopt for our own present situation of being physically separated?

3. In a book full of memorable verses, verse 6 is worth cementing into our minds. First, what does this express about the character of God? Second, where in your life do you need to apply this truth to right now? How about in our church?

4. How unlikely is it that Paul's imprisonment would actually advance the gospel (v. 12)!? Can you imagine ways that our current situation with COVID-19 might also serve to advance the gospel? If you've already seen this happen, please share!

5. Take time to discuss and then pray for the needs of everyone in your group during this challenging season. Consider closing with these words from verses 9-11:

"⁹ And it is [our] prayer that [our] love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that [we] may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."