

# Proclaiming Christ

**Bible Background • PHILIPPIANS 1:12–30**

**Printed Text • PHILIPPIANS 1:15–26 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 119:169–176**

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **COMPREHEND** Paul’s message of joy in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; **REFLECT** on the variety of motives for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and **FASHION** a personal proclamation of the Gospel.

## In Focus

Warren and Deloris drove home from the doctor’s office in silence. They both had a hundred thoughts passing through their heads. The doctor had actually said the word: cancer. If he were to live at all, Warren would have to undergo surgery and extensive chemotherapy. They would have to break the news to their children and grandchildren. Warren would also have to tell the church.

“Well,” Warren finally broke their silence, “this will certainly put my faith to the test. Now I must live what I have preached for so long.”

“Baby, don’t try to deny what you are really feeling about this. Not for my sake, not for the children’s, and not for the church’s sake, either,” Deloris responded.

“It’s not that,” Warren said. “I know that people will be watching me. It’s important to me that I will be able to praise the Lord throughout this ordeal, whether it means life or death. If I can’t, I’ll end up feeling like my entire life, not to mention my faith, has been just a front.”

*Many things come into our lives that challenge our public witness. People are watching to see if we are for real. Paul teaches us how to walk with God through the fires of life.*

## Keep in Mind

“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”  
(Philippians 1:18, KJV)

## Focal Verses

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**KJV** **Philippians 1:15** Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:

**16** The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:

**17** But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.

**18** What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

**19** For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

**20** According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed,

but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

**21** For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

**22** But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

**23** For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:

**24** Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

**25** And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith;

**26** That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

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## The People, Places, and Times

**Prison.** During the time that the New Testament was written, people could be imprisoned for nonpayment of debt (Matthew 5:25–26), political insurrection, criminal acts (Luke 23:19, 25), and for certain religious practices (Acts 8:3). The Apostle Paul was often in prison. On one occasion, he and Silas were placed under the charge of a lone jailer, who put them in an inner cell and placed their feet in stocks (Acts 16:23–24). The inner cell was probably for maximum security or solitary confinement. In Jerusalem, Paul was detained in a Roman barracks (Acts 23:11–18). In Caesarea, Paul's confinement did allow him some freedom, and he was allowed to have visitors (Acts 23:33–35). As he awaited trial in Rome, Paul was guarded constantly under a type of house arrest (Acts 28:16–17, 30). While there, he met his own expenses and was free to receive visitors and preach the Gospel.

**Roman Empire.** In the early days of the Christian movement, several emperors ruled the empire. Most of Paul's ministry is believed to have occurred under the reign of Gaius (Caligula, A.D. 37–41) and his aging uncle Claudius (A.D. 41–54). Claudius reportedly expelled some Jews from Rome because they were creating disturbances with their efforts to spread the Gospel. It is believed that both Paul and Peter were martyred during Nero's reign (A.D. 54–68), perhaps in connection with the burning of Rome in A.D. 64, an event for which Nero blamed Christians.

## Background

It's interesting how some people can devote themselves to encouraging others in the midst of their own struggle. Many terminally-ill children, instead of feeling sorry for themselves, have been a source of encouragement for the families they leave behind. Paul was encouraging to his Christian family. Even

as he sat in prison, his letter was full of love, encouragement, and instruction for those who were carrying on the work. It is very likely that his co-laborers in Christ were feeling worse about Paul's imprisonment than he was. Paul recognized that his release from prison was uncertain. However, as he contemplated his fate, Paul did not lose faith in God. He did not become bitter or angry about his circumstances. He did not cease the work to which he had been called. Through good times and trials, Paul remained faithful to God and his task.

### At-A-Glance

1. A New Effort (Philippians 1:15–18)
2. A Certain Victory (vv. 19–26)

### In Depth

#### 1. A New Effort (Philippians 1:15–18)

Paul's confinement led to many new efforts to spread the Gospel. No one particular movement could do the work. Some followers were stronger because Paul was in jail. Perhaps they felt they had to fill in the gap left by Paul's absence. Paul called into question the motives of those who were preaching about Christ. Some were preaching out of "envy and strife" (v. 15), while others were preaching out of genuine goodwill. Some may have been jealous of the attention Paul was receiving despite his imprisonment. This very well may have been the case in Rome where Christianity had been established before Paul came. His presence there may have posed a threat to the Christian leaders who were already there. Some were likely vying for Paul's leadership role within the Christian community, assuming he would not be released. His rivals must have felt that their success would cause Paul to become jealous, perhaps adding to his troubles. Instead, he

rejoiced that others were spreading the Gospel, regardless of their motives. Paul recognized that the Gospel is powerful enough to transcend human pettiness. If this were not so, the spread of the Gospel would have stopped at Calvary. There is no human who is truly worthy to preach the Gospel. It is fallen human nature to be affected by envy, strife, egotism, narcissism, and partisanship. From the pulpit, all kinds of motives fuel the Sunday morning sermon. Still, the Gospel is preached, and people come to Christ. Paul's solution was to continue making the Gospel known and rejoice that it came through multiple means. The Good News cannot be held hostage to human imperfection. No one can alter its power. Not even the worst example of Christianity can take away the power of the Gospel. Paul's message has many implications for the Christian community today.

#### 2. A Certain Victory (vv. 19–26)

Paul was confident that his experience—of being both jailed and harassed by rival Christians—would lead to victory. He wrote confidently of salvation as a result of his circumstances (v. 19). Some translations refer to Paul's "deliverance," and others suggest that he was referring to salvation in its fullest sense. The latter is that full redemption would be realized through Christ. The apostle was sure of his dependency on Christ for the impending victory. He quoted Job 13:16 (the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures) where Job looked confidently to his ultimate vindication. There is no indication, however, that Paul was certain of his release from prison, nor did he appear to be excessively concerned about it. Paul's primary concern was not with life or death, as determined by the outcome of his trial. He appears to have been chiefly concerned with his own constitution, that he would not be afflicted with any manner of shame. Instead, he hoped for Christ to be "magnified" (Philippians

1:20). Paul was not looking to be a hero. He was willing to meet his fate, whether life or death, so that all could see how much Christ meant to him.

Paul stood at the crossroads between life and death. The apostle found favor in either outcome. Paul had no desire to escape death in favor of life. He viewed death as a portal into the greater realm of a life already filled with greatness. To Paul, life was Christ, who gave Paul's life meaning. Apart from Him, life held no meaning or purpose. Death, therefore, did not equal loss but gain. He knew that death was not final. Rather, it was an extension of his marching orders as a soldier in the army of the Lord. The life he knew in Christ would only become more magnificent through death. Conversely, if Paul's life was spared, he viewed it as an invitation to do more fruitful work for the kingdom. His only interest in being released from jail was that it would allow him to continue his ministry. He could preach the Gospel a while longer. He could continue to encourage the churches that had become so dear to him. Through life, he could continue to live and do more for Christ.

For years, Paul had been working in the trenches as a missionary—spreading the Gospel and encouraging and guiding the faithful. His hard work was just beginning to show results. Like a farmer who has been tending to trees hoping they will bear fruit, Paul is longing to see evidence of the harvest. He desires to stay because there is so much to be done. The two options the apostle faced did cause some divided feelings, which he expressed in verse 23. Understandably, Paul was pulled between his two options. Not that he viewed either as negative. Instead, in his heart, he longed to be with Christ. His was not a morbid desire, however. Paul probably envisioned a life with Christ too wonderful for the human spirit to totally conceive.

On the other hand, he wanted to be of service to his fellow Christians. He viewed the

continuance of life as being necessary only for the sake of the Philippians (v. 24). Paul was willing for his life to be used in whatever way the Lord deemed necessary. The Philippians were openly proud of Paul, whom they, in a sense, regarded as their own special apostle. Paul lovingly reminded them that Christ, not he, must remain the subject of their boasting. If he was to return to them, they should rejoice in the works of Jesus Christ, not himself. Paul's ability to have hope, even in the most hopeless of circumstances, came from his own experience of being granted new life after his former life had passed on. The boldness he possessed came from his certainty that Christ would be honored by him, whether through his life or his death.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. For what motives were some preaching the Gospel (Philippians 1:15–17)?
2. Why were motives unimportant in preaching the Gospel (v. 18)?
3. For what reason did Paul want to remain alive (v. 25)?
4. Of what benefit would his continued life be to the Philippians (v. 26)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

1. Paul reached a high spiritual point that caused him to rejoice, whether the outcome of his trial meant life or death. How did he reach such a point of spiritual maturity?
2. Why were some of the Christians strengthened by Paul's imprisonment? Why did they not become fearful that the same thing might happen to them?

### **Liberating Lesson**

Every Christian professes belief in eternal life. Yet, very often, when we think of death, we get scared at the uncertainty of our fate. Perhaps this is because we do not feel certain about our salvation. Some may doubt Christ's

promise. Our enslaved ancestors sang often of heaven—of the streets paved with gold, the pearly gates, where the Sabbath would have no end. They longed for the day when “trouble will be no more,” and every person would live in freedom and equality. Perhaps because there has been a general improvement in our social and economic standing, many of us now appear to place more value on life on earth than eternal life. No matter what attainments life holds, it can never compare to the future glory of life with Christ Jesus. As Christians, we must rejoice in our assurance of eternal life and leave the matter of when we will go to heaven in the hands of God.

**Application for Activation**

If you were told today that you may not live much longer, what preparation would you make to ensure that Christ would be glorified through your experience of passing from life to death?

**Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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**Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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**Sources:**

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**Say It Correctly**

Philippians. fi-LIP-ee-uhn-z.  
 Praetorian. pray-TOR-ee-uhn.

**Daily Bible Readings**

**MONDAY**

Praising God in Word and Life  
 (Psalm 119:169–176)

**TUESDAY**

Giving Glory to God  
 (Matthew 5:13–16)

**WEDNESDAY**

Making the Word Fully Known  
 (Colossians 1:21–29)

**THURSDAY**

Sharing in the Gospel  
 (Philippians 1:1–7)

**FRIDAY**

Speaking the Word with Boldness  
 (Philippians 1:8–14)

**SATURDAY**

Toiling to Proclaim the Gospel  
 (1 Thessalonians 2:1–11)

**SUNDAY**

Proclaiming Christ in Every Way  
 (Philippians 1:15–26)