

# Reflections on Philippians 1.18b-26

by Will Groben

---

## Day 1

**Learn:** Starting with “Yes, and I will continue to rejoice,” prayerfully read Philippians 1.18b-20; if possible, use NASB, ESV, or NKJV. Paul would continue to rejoice because he trusted in his deliverance. But what is this deliverance? Is it deliverance from prison? No, the deliverance Paul seeks is a spiritual one with real physical world results: he seeks empowerment to exalt Christ at all times, thus avoiding the disgrace of failing to do so [this is most clear in NASB, ESV, NKJV, which translate 1.19-20 as one sentence, as in the Greek text]. He hopes to exalt Christ in the way he lives, whether as a free man or as a prisoner, and he hopes to exalt Christ when the time comes to die, even if that means execution as a prisoner.

Others might see his imprisonment [and his potential execution as a criminal] to be shameful, but Paul does not, because he knows he is exalting Christ by how he lives in prison and he knows his suffering is helping advance the gospel [1.12]. Thus he also knows that his suffering is not a sign of God’s disfavor, so there is no shame in it. Some of the Philippians assumed the opposite. Some of them were using “bottom line” human reasoning, and they desired physical deliverance for themselves, so they assumed that physical deliverance indicated God’s approval and suffering indicated God’s disapproval. Paul, on the other hand, knew he was vindicated in the heavenly court; he knew he was delivered – he was in the will of God – even while imprisoned.

**Reflect:** Have you ever felt ashamed of problems or setbacks in your life? Can you see from Paul’s example, that there is no shame in struggling or suffering? If you were confident at all times that God loved you, was pleased with you, and was going to bless you, how would that affect your emotions and thoughts during hard times? How would that affect your confidence? your sense of peace? your ability to rejoice at being alive? your sense of thankfulness?

---

## Day 2

**Learn:** Starting at the same point as yesterday, prayerfully read Philippians 1.18b-26 [any translation]. To Paul, the only disgrace would be failing to exalt Christ, so the deliverance Paul craved was empowerment to exalt [glorify, honor] Christ at all times. While he was in jail, he could model faith by continuing to experience peace, joy, contentment, and thankfulness, while avoiding anxiety, anger, and depression; he could continue to share the gospel; he could continue to teach fellow believers by writing letters like this one. If he were to be executed, he could exalt Christ by not denying his faith to avoid death, by allowing faith to sustain him through death, and by dying for the gospel as a martyr-witness for Christ.

**Reflect:** If your priority was to exalt Christ while you were suffering, how would that affect your reaction to your hardships? How would it affect your commitment to blessing others while you were struggling? your commitment to sharing the gospel? serving in church? praising Jesus publically? Think of past hardships you have experienced; what would you have done differently if you had had Paul’s perspective?

---

## Day 3

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.18b-20. Paul trusts God will deliver him to experiential righteousness, so that he always is honoring Christ, but what does he identify here as the means God uses to bring this about? Paul expects his deliverance will come through the prayers of the Philippians and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

**Reflect:** If an apostle, one of the most spiritual people ever, needed prayer support, what about you? Do you have anyone praying for you regularly, at least every week? Whom could you ask to do this for you [keep in mind you should promise to pray for them too!]? Do you pray for anyone regularly? It is impossible to understand exactly how prayer makes a difference, but the testimony of scripture is that it does. Do you believe in the need for prayer, the power of prayer? Are you willing to regularly pray for unsaved loved ones to come to faith? for friends and family to be blessed? for spiritual leaders in your church? for government leaders and first responders? If Paul

needed to rely on the Holy Spirit for empowerment, what about you? How well are you depending on the Spirit and doing things God's way and in God's timing, instead of taking matters into your own hands with fleshly solutions?

---

#### **Day 4**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.21-26. What is the purpose of life in Paul's view? "For to me, to live is Christ!" For Paul, to live is to be focused on Christ, empowered by Christ, conformed to Christ, glorifying Christ, serving Christ by carrying out Christ's gospel mission and helping Christ's people like the Philippians to grow and also pursue the gospel mission. For Paul, life – or any part of life – has no meaning apart from Christ.

**Reflect:** What is the purpose of life for you? Now that you know the right answer [the scriptural answer], you might say what you are supposed to say, but what does your lifestyle say? For what do you really live? What do you pursue in life, what are your ambitions? Are these compatible with having Christ as your lord and master? Do you need to adjust your priorities, so Christ is more your focus and worldly goals less so?

---

#### **Day 5**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.21-26. Physical death was not part of God's design at creation, it was a result of sin. Yet Paul can view death with joy, because when it comes for him it will release him from the struggle here and deliver him into Christ's presence in Heaven. There is purpose in life but also benefit in death, and Paul says he is "hard pressed" between the two, the imagery suggesting being pressured by two converging military forces. Paul, for his own benefit, would rather die, but he would choose to remain alive so he could continue helping the Philippians; he would choose to bless others rather than be blessed himself.

Paul is convinced that God will allow him to live and go free, so he can be with the Philippians again. Paul knows his release would be an answer to their prayers and that his continued teaching would help them grow in faith, so they would have greater reason to boast in Christ. In fact Paul hopes their boasting in Christ will "abound"; he used the same word for "abound" here as he used when he prayed for their love to abound [1.9]. As the Philippians grew spiritually, as they accepted their suffering and continued to embrace the gospel mission, they would understand better why they could and should boast in Christ. Read Jeremiah 9.23-24.

**Reflect:** Are you afraid to die? Should you be afraid, based on what Paul teaches? Putting death aside, much of our anxiety and discontentment about life come from our focus on our struggles. If we accepted those struggles as expected aspects of life with Christ and focused instead on the immense blessings we have in Christ, how would that affect our emotions and attitudes? If you were content in life and unafraid to die, how would that change how you think and live?

---

#### **Bonus thoughts**

Paul was released from prison in AD62. Did he visit Philippi again? We know from later letters to Timothy and Titus, that Paul visited Miletus and Troas [2 Timothy 4.13, 20]; also Crete [Titus 1.5]; and Macedonia [1 Timothy 1.3]. Macedonia was the region in which Philippi and Thessalonica were located, so it seems likely he did get there again! By the time he wrote 2 Timothy, he was in prison again, and not expecting release [2 Timothy 4.6]. If you have access to a Bible atlas, try to locate these places.

In the opening of the letter [1.1-11], Paul expressed confidence that God would ensure the Philippians continued to do the work of the gospel mission in partnership with Paul. This section began [1.12] with assurance that Paul's imprisonment resulted in the advance [the Greek word προκοπή; prah-kah-PAY] of the gospel mission. Now it ends [1.25-26] with assurance that Paul's release is coming, for the sake of their progress [προκοπή; prah-kah-PAY] in their faith and the gospel mission. A little word play by Paul to tie this all together.