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**4** | PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18  
Joy in Setbacks and Suffering

Keys to Joy in Setbacks

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**Announcements**

1. Welcome visitors!
2. PGM 6pm Tonight
3. New Members Class Sun Nov 18, 9:30am
4. Pie Fellowship Sun Nov 18, 5pm. Invite friends and family.

***Introduction***

Open your Bible if you will to **Philippians 1**. The title of our study this morning is: “Joy in Setbacks and Suffering.”

### Turn Back the Clock

It’s funny that today is setback day for your clocks, and I have a sermon on setbacks!

For the 100th year, we turned our clocks back an hour, banishing the gloom of dark mornings but robbing us of those beautiful daylit evenings. We gain an hour of sleep, but we lose an hour of daylight in the evening.

Some people get frustrated with the falling back and the Springing forward. One thing we can do with Daylight Savings Time is blame Canada. They started it in 1908, a hundred years ago. It’s Canada’s fault.

For some of you, the best thing about Daylight Savings time is that the clock in your car and microwave are finally correct!

There are consequences that go with having earlier sun downs. Today, sundown is at 4:43pm. That means at 5pm tonight, it’ll look like midnight, but it’ll only be 5 o’clock!

According to a government survey (from YouGov)— 74 percent of Americans say a **lack of daylight** affects their **mood** and their productivity. John Sharp, M.D., psychiatrist on faculty at Harvard Medical School, who helped with the study says, the darkness of winter “**really affects us** and can cause people to be irritable, sleepy, and want to quit the day earlier. It’s easier just to shut it all down at 5pm.”[[1]](#footnote-2) Some of you are asking, “What do I do if I’m just grumpy all year long?!”

Seriously, the darkness of winter has an adverse effect on some people. Think of it, back in June, we had 15 hours of daylight. Today we have only 10. By the end of the year we’ll have only 9 hours of daylight.

Because of the lack of daylight for the next three months, some people get the winter blues, and many of them do what all sane people should do in these Chicago winters: they move to Florida. All in favor? Say Amen!

As we look to the book of Philippians, we know it’s not just winter that might dampen our mood. There are some serious dark and cold circumstances and setbacks in our lives that very well might steal our joy. I don’t want that to happen. You don’t want that to happen. And you know what? God doesn’t want that to happen.

In our passage today, we are going to see how the greatest setbacks. What is a setback? The dictionary defines setback as “an obstacle to progress; a reverse or defeat.”

#### Corrections

I came across a website for the criminal justice system, called *corrections.com*, in which this statement was on it.

Most prisoners are unhappy. And many of them are unhappy all the time. Many contemplate or attempt suicide or self-mutilation. The suicide rate for American prisoners is between 5 to 15 times greater than it is for the general American population.

I'm sharing that with you to begin with, because I just want you to keep in mind that we are reading the letter of a prisoner.

It’s no joke to be in prison. Paul is in prison as he is writing the book of Philippians. In fact he writes four prison epistles: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. Being in prison is very difficult. Yet Paul is filled with joy.

Paul is writing this letter to the Philippians from prison, under house arrest. He’s got a Roman soldier chained to him 24/7 for more than two years. This seems like a major setback for the Gospel. Yet Paul says: my setbacks, **past**, **present** and **future** are really advances for the Gospel. What?! That sounds extreme. Yet that’s exactly what Paul says. Let’s read about it.

*Scripture Reading*

Let’s stand and read our passage today, Philippians 1:12-21,

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to **advance** the gospel, **13**so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. **14**And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. **15**Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.**16**The latter do it out of love, knowing that **I am put here** for the defense of the gospel. **17**The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. **18**What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, **19**for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,**20**as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether **by life or by death**. **21**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (1:12-21).

*This is God’s Word.*

# The Gospel Advances with **Past** Setbacks (1:12-14)

*The advance of the gospel must shape how we evaluate our past.*

## Setbacks are Planned by God

You may be a Christian and in a terrible circumstance. Perhaps your circumstance is stealing your joy. Isn’t it true that sometimes things happen to us in our past that set us back and steal our joy? Paul was a man who would not allow his joy to be stolen. How? He believed his setbacks were planned by God.

I want you to know, brothers, that what has **happened** to me has really served to **advance** the gospel (1:12).

He says, what’s happened in my life seems to be something to steal my joy, but it’s not. It seems like something that would make the Gospel decline, but it’s not. It’s actually working to **advance** the gospel.

#### The Timing of Salvation

This was true of his former life. He says in **Philippians 3:8**, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” It’s all garbage compared to knowing Christ. Can we all agree that all our past failures as well as our past successes are equally refuse compared to knowing Christ?

But Paul goes further. Here is a terrible, difficult circumstance that puts Paul in jail. It looks like the prospects for the Gospel’s advance are declining. It looks like the Gospel is in a downturn. Paul’s in jail. The chief leader for the Gospel is in chains. What a set back! Paul says: no. It’s not a setback. It’s a stepping stone. It’s an **advance**.

### The Bible Story of Paul’s Imprisonment

Here’s what happened. After Paul’s third missionary journey, he goes back to Jerusalem. He’s warned in advance by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:23) that he’s going to have trouble in Jerusalem and get arrested.

According to Acts 21:27-36, Paul’s in the temple area with another fellow going through a ceremonial ritual. Some of the leaders spot Paul there. They start a riot, and they attack him. A Roman soldier arrests Paul—not to **punish** him, but to **protect** him from the mob—he takes Paul, is about to have Paul beaten. Paul pulls his Roman citizenship card out and says, you can't beat me. I'm a Roman citizen. And everywhere Paul goes, he preaches the Gospel – he tells his story. He’s in the barracks in Jerusalem, and he tells his story, “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me…” (Acts 22:6).

He’s is then taken from Jerusalem to Caesarea by the sea, where he spends two years. And he goes through three trials in two years. He stands before **Felix**, and he tells his story (Acts 24:24, **Felix** “sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus”). He stands before **Festus** and **King** **Herod Agrippa**, and he tells his story (Acts 26:12ff, “I journeyed to Damascus … **13**At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun”). And after two years, he finally says, I'm done. This judicial process is crazy. I appeal my case to Caesar in Rome. Every Roman citizen had that right.

So they put him on a ship. It is not a cruise ship. It's not a Princess Cruise. It is the Prison cruise ship! And they send him to Rome.

He almost doesn't make it to Rome. The ship sinks. He has to swim to shore. Paul made sure all the prisoners were accounted for. But he finally goes to Rome, where he's put in jail again – under house arrest.

## Setbacks Can Advance the Gospel

All of that is under this banner, Paul says, “**the things which happened to me**” (1:12). A lot had happened to Paul. Now that set of circumstances is enough to change any **joyful** person into a **depressed** person quickly. But not Paul. He’s not depressed. How could he be depressed? The Gospel is going forth. He’s telling the Gospel everywhere to kings and governors, to fellow prisoners, and eventually to Roman soldiers when he’s put under house arrest. Paul says: these things are not a defeat or a setback. They are an **advance**.

I want you to know, brothers, that what has **happened** to me has really served to **advance** the gospel (1:12).

The Greek word for **advance** means a **forward movement overcoming any kind of obstacles**. Obstacles are involved. God can use setbacks to put you in a position to actually advances the Gospel overcoming any obstacles. The word for **advance** was used of **pioneers** *cutting undergrowth away, so you could walk with ease*. It was also used for **soldiers** advancing against an enemy. This advance of the Gospel was a ***forward movement overcoming all obstacles.***

#### Super Heroes

Did you ever get into super heroes when you were a kid? Are some of you still into super heroes? My son Evan’s favorite super hero is Captain America. My favorite has always been Superman. I love to tell Ava my superman jokes.

*What does Superman use to eat his cereal? A Super Bowl.*

Ok I’ll quit while I’m ahead*.*

I like Superman because he’s the man of steel. You can throw anything at him, and he crushes it. Throw volts of electricity, and he absorbs it. There is no possible challenge. Superman has one weakness though. Remember what it is? Kryptonite.

Our God has no weakness. When we totally commit our lives to him, he can absorb any setback and turn it into a stepping stone.

* Daniel’s lions were not a setback but a stepping stone for the faith of the King of Persia.
* Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego looked done for in the fiery furnace. But God turned that setback into a great victory!
* Joseph had setback after setback, from the pit to slavery to the prison. But God turned that setback into a stepping stone to the palace.
* Moses had a setback at the Red Sea. But God through Moses said, “Stand back and see the salvation of the Lord!”
* Job lost everything. What a setback. But look what God did. God turned his setback into a comeback. Today Job’s life encourages suffering people more than any book in the Bible.

God doesn’t want you to be a **dropout** when the setback comes. He wants you to be a **billboard** of his sufficient grace! And now, though Paul was in prison, he was advancing the Gospel like never before. Here we have two ways the Gospel is advanced through setbacks while Paul is in prison.

### Advancing the Gospel with Roman Soldiers

For Paul, his setbacks opened the door for an audience of **Roman soldiers** to hear the Gospel and believe on Christ. God's plan has been furthered for the palace guard.

How many Roman soldiers were coming to the Christian churches in Rome? **None**. How many Roman soldiers were they reaching before Paul was imprisoned. If you count the Philippian jailer, supposing he was at one time a Roman soldier, it’s about one! Isn’t God’s grace amazing? What looks like a setback is actually an advance.

so that it has become known throughout the **whole imperial guard** and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ (1:13).

The whole imperial guard was reached with the Gospel. The Imperial Guard was the elite personal soldiers for the emperor. There was about 10,000 of them in the Roman Empire. They were the bodyguards of the emperor.

#### Paul in Rented Home with Palace Guard

Now Paul is incarcerated in Rome. He’s not in the palace. He's in a rented home likely provided by another believer or a church, the Book of Acts tells us (Acts 28:30). Paul is chained to a guard 24 hours a day in a rented house. But the people chained to him are the elite soldiers of the Imperial Guard. That would be like being chained to the Secret Service or to the CIA, the elite of the elite.

Here’s the issue. Roman soldiers were unlikely to go to Paul’s evangelistic talks. These were men who were rough and hard hearted. They weren’t philosophizing about eternal life. After their shift they were ready for a beer at the pub. They were ready for the equivalent of a game of pool. They weren’t about to seek out a converted Jew and talk to him. So God says, “*That’s fine, but I want to evangelize the soldiers, and I have an unusual turn of events for you Paul. Since they’re not coming to the Bible Studies, I’m going to send the evangelist apostle to them*.” This isn’t a prison ministry where Paul gets to walk in and walk out. He’s going to be incarcerated with one soldier after another being chained to Paul. Wow!

I want you to know, brothers, that what has **happened** to me has really served to **advance** the gospel (1:12).

How does God **advance** the Gospel with this great setback? Paul's chained to these Roman soldiers. Think of what it was like to be chained to Paul the Apostle for six hours. That's how it worked. There are 24 hours a day. 4 soldiers chained six hours at a time to Paul. So Paul couldn't eat without being chained. He couldn't sleep without being chained. Everything he did 24 hours was chained to a guard. Now we often think, oh, **Paul was in chains**. But think of it the other way. *So was the soldier.*

Can you imagine what it's like to listen to Paul? What do you think Paul brought up during that six hours? The Gospel: “*Jesus died for sinners. Jesus can forgive you. Let me tell you about this Jesus. I was walking on the Damascus road*…” You couldn't shut him up. Paul talked a lot about his conversion.

Have you ever shared with somebody in a conversation—you bring up the Gospel. They don't like what you have to say. So they walk away. Paul’s audience of Roman soldiers *couldn’t* walk away. Talk about a captive audience.

### Advancing the Gospel through a Bold Example

So we see the Gospel has done it’s work so that the whole palace guard knows he’s imprisoned for Christ. Some of them are getting converted. The Gospel is advancing. The Roman Christians as well are now beginning **to speak more boldly without fear**.

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear (1:14).

#### Paul in Prison

Christian brothers would visit Paul in his confinement. They didn’t have seminaries and Bible colleges to train people back then. Their great theologian was in prison. With a Roman soldier looking on and listening, Paul would speak to the brothers who would visit him. He would encourage them to speak boldly. He would pray for them when they departed. “*O God, I thank you that you put me in here. And I thank you that my brother came to see me. And I thank you for the guy that’s chained to me here Lord. And I thank you that he’s got to hear everything we’ve said. And I thank you for the soldier earlier in the day, on the day shift, he got to hear it too. O God you are in control*.”

The brothers left Paul, and they must have been like “*Did you see that Roman soldier, how he was listening? God opened his heart. We too can witness like Paul*.”

#### The Soldier in the Pub

Maybe that Roman soldier went to the local pub, and he says, “You know we have got one weird guy I have to guard at the moment.” And here’s this timid Christian. And he’s sitting over in a corner and overhears all this. And there’s a courage that rises in him, “*But he’s quite a man you know*.” And he finds stirring and rising within him a renewed confidence. And he speaks the Word of the Gospel there in that pub without fear. God is surely with Paul in his circumstance to give him boldness. God is most certainly with me in my circumstance. I need to be more bold in the faith.

You’ve got to **get over your fear** and realize that God is in control of your setbacks. We can’t shut down in our trials. We’ve got to reach out for that grace. Share Christ. Be bold. He’s got you just where he wants you. He wants you to use your setback to show the strength of God and to embolden his people.

#### Be Effective despite your Setback

Don’t let your setback hold you back. Let it make you more bold. Paul was in a terrible circumstance. But God was not so interested in changing Paul’s circumstance. Sometimes God puts us in very difficult places in our lives. Our prayers during those times is “God get me out of this and then I’ll be an effective witness.” God’s logic is very different from our own. We assume if we are going to be effective Christians, the circumstances have to be right. But God is concerned with making really effective Christians even if the circumstances are wrong. That’s why we shouldn’t spend so much time trying to change our circumstances. We need to get on with sharing the Gospel whatever our circumstances are. That’s what Paul did.

#### Your Past Set Back is Your Mission Field

God’s given you a setback. What is your setback. Speak it in your mind. You know what it is. For Paul it was a prison. He looked at what had put him there in his past. He didn’t regret how things turned out. He said it actually advanced the Gospel. What’s your setback in the past that you wish you could change? Maybe the Lord is turning your setback into a mission field. Do you believe God can turn your setback into a triumph for the Gospel?

#### Personal Story: Wish I was Saved Earlier

For me, there have been times in my life I wish I could change the time of my conversion. I wish I had Christian parents that cared for me. I have so much baggage from my childhood. It’s painful. But you see the Lord took my pain and turned into his gain. Because of my own pain I feel other people’s pain. I have empathy for people. That pain helps me to listen to others. I don’t want anyone to live without Christ, so it emboldens me to speak the Gospel.

You’re the same way. God’s in total control of your past. He wants you to turn your setback into a mission field. Maybe you had an awful childhood. Maybe you were raised in a false religion. Maybe you were on the streets at a young age. Maybe you saw your parents get a divorce. Whatever your setback, God wants you to use it to advance his cause, his Gospel. Jesus died for sinners. There are plenty of people who are hurting and need someone like you to listen to them and then to give them the hope of eternal life in Jesus. God is in total control of your past, present and future if you are his child. Acknowledge that. Realize he’s advancing the Gospel through your pain and setbacks.

# The Gospel Advances with **Present** Setbacks (1:15-18)

*The advance of the gospel must shape how we evaluate our present circumstances.*

## In Setbacks, we Look to God’s Sovereignty

Paul is in jail, and he can do nothing about those in the church who are making the Gospel about themselves. He sees that some preach Christ with wrong motives (like envy and rivalry and self-promition). But he’s not out of sorts. He remembers others who love him and know as he says, “**I am put here**” for the Gospel.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.**16**The latter do it out of love, knowing that **I am put here** for the defense of the gospel. **17**The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but **thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment**. **18**What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and **in that I rejoice** (1:15-18).

You’d think that if God wanted Paul to defend the Gospel, he’d certainly get him out of prison. From the outside it looked like Paul was being put on the shelf. And people using his imprisonment to promote themselves, even “thinking to afflict [Paul] in [his] imprisonment” (1:17).

“*He’s not preaching right, that’s why he’s in prison*.”

“*There must be sin in his life*.”

“*We have a more holy way of living than Paul*.”

“*Paul’s not as articulate as our pastor*.”

“*He’s got such a far-reaching ministry, he must be compromising for so many to come to Christ*.”

And they were causing him harm and gossiping and making stuff up about him.

One factor that controlled Paul’s thinking is the sovereignty of God. Paul had planned to go on from Rome to Spain, Gaul, the frontier lands along the Rhine, and lands where Huns and Goths and Vandals sat in pagan darkness. The islands of Britannia also beckoned. His plans for evangelism had been as wide as the world.

But Paul was in chains. A lesser man would have questioned God’s ways, fretted over his enforced inaction, and perhaps become embittered. Not Paul! He knew his chains were divinely planned and God made no mistakes; he knew God had not lost control.[[2]](#footnote-3)

God put Paul there in the prison. God is in control. It’s not just true for Paul or special people. It is true for every believer, for in each and every case “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (1:6). God rules. The pressures of life are the hands of the Potter, who is also our Father; the fires of life are those of the Refiner (Mal 3:3).[[3]](#footnote-4)

#### God is Shaping Us with Setbacks

Our setbacks form us to be what God wants us to be.

A man long ago said, “I watched some stone workers hewing an odd-shaped stone as it lay on the ground.

“What are you going to do with that?” someone asked.

“We are cutting it here, so it will fit in up there,” the worker answered, pointing to an opening high on the tower of the great building.”

That’s what God is doing with our setbacks. He’s forming us. He’s shaping us. Trust God’s sovereignty. He knows what he’s doing for you. But he’s also doing something for this lost world through you.

## In Setbacks, we Look to God’s Salvation

Paul is in jail, and he sees that the church is in trouble. There are factions and people promoting themselves more than Christ.

Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.**16**The latter do it out of love, knowing that **I am put here** for the defense of the gospel. **17**The former proclaim Christ out of **selfish ambition**, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. **18**What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and **in that I rejoice** (1:15-18).

There was envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition. There were those even in the early church that wanted their brand of Christianity. They were preaching the Gospel, but saying perhaps that theirs was a more pure form of the Gospel or of holiness. It even says they were “proclaiming Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but **thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment**” (1:17).

#### Preaching Christ to Exalt Self

There were and are those in the church that get their eyes more on their own ministry than on Christ. Isn’t that strange that ministry itself can be an idol. We have to be careful. There are some that promote Christ for their own selfish ambition. They promote Christ because they want to be known as a great evangelist or a great teacher.

And they were saying, “*Our church is the best church. You don’t want to go to that church down the street. They don’t have the Gospel as clear as our church*.”

Paul exposed these false motives, as he should have. But he didn’t go negative. He says, “I **rejoice**” that Christ is proclaimed!

# The Gospel Advances with **Future** Setbacks (1:19-21)

*The advance of the gospel must shape how we evaluate our future circumstances.*

## In Life or Death Christ is Glorified

Paul now turns to the future. What’s the worst that could happen? Well Paul prays for his deliverance, but he is content with either life or death. Because of contentment, he is able to rejoice. Look at 1:18b.

Yes, and I will rejoice, **19**for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,**20**as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether **by life or by death**. **21**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (1:18b-21).

Paul says, I’m not afraid of the future because **whether by life or by death, I want to honor and glorify Christ**. “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain!”

As a Christian, you don’t have to worry about the past, the present, or the future because whatever you are going through is there to set you up to glorify God. Honor him. He’s sovereign in your setbacks.

What’s the absolute worse thing that could happen to Paul or to you? Death. Death is victory for the Christian. No matter what happens, in life, I will honor Christ. I will spread his Gospel. In death, I will be with Christ, what could be better?! You need to have a Philippians 1:21 outlook on life. All is gain. To live is Christ and to die is gain! Romans 8:29-30 says the same. All things work together for your good and God’s glory for the child of God.

#### If Your Not Ready to Die, Not Ready to Live

What about you? Is Philippians 1:21 your motto? My friend, if you're not ready to die, you're not ready to live. If you don’t know Christ, your you can advance your career, your family, your finances. But if you don’t know Christ, your greatest setback will be death. If you are without Christ today, you need to come to him. Believe that he died for your sins and rose again for you. Your sins separate you from God, but Christ will cleanse you of your sins and bring you to God.

**Conclusion**

When I was in high school, I was **defensive end** for the Ponchatoula Green wave in high school. Our goal was to sack the quarterback. One game we found a weakness in the offensive line. My friend Bobby Smith sacrifice himself and throw himself against a couple of the front line and I would one of us would sack the quarterback and turn the ball to our team!

Maybe God has you in a place of sacrifice and suffering. You feel like your pain is in vain. But really, it’s a way that God can advance the Gospel. Any pain you have is there to advance the Gospel for his glory.

Remember in your setbacks there is no obstacle that can hold you back the Gospel. Your setback is a mission field. Preach Christ! Remember Jesus said, “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18).

1. Manning-Schaffel, Vivian. "The Clocks 'fall Back' Sunday at 2:00 a.m. Here's How to Survive the Darker Days." NBCNews.com. November 03, 2018. Accessed November 03, 2018. https://www.nbcnews.com/better/health/clocks-fall-back-daylight-saving-time-ends-sunday-here-s-ncna930016. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. John Phillips, [*Exploring Ephesians & Philippians: An Expository Commentary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/jpcs70eph01?ref=Bible.Php1.12&off=2596&ctx=e+Lord+from+Heaven.%0a~Paul+had+planned+to+), The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Php 1:12. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. J. A. Motyer, [*The Message of Philippians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bstus71php?ref=Bible.Php1.12-26&off=5209&ctx=ress+of+the+gospel.%0a~One+factor+had%2c+in+r), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)