

## A STUDY OF THE PRISON EPISTLES

### UNHINDERED

What's holding you back? We all have excuses for why we haven't achieved or received what we've pursued. We've all heard the story about the young Michael Jordan getting shoved down to the JV squad in his sophomore year. In his words, "I was demoralized and didn't want to play any more sports." Wisely, his mother said, "If you really want it, you work hard over the summer." By the next year, the investment (and growing 5 inches) paid off. The kid that got cut became "the best player in America," according to UNC assistant coach, Roy Williams.

Let me ask a question, "Why not you?" How about in a few years we write your story as the one who couldn't be held back? It takes grit—and that's why so few achieve.

Paul knew something about grit. He had every excuse to stop and give up. However, he took time to encourage the Philippians that his *situation has actually turned out to advance the gospel* (1:12). In today's passage, the man who couldn't be stopped explains how he's stayed unhindered.

#### PHILIPPIANS 1:20–30

<sup>20</sup> My confident hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether I live or die. <sup>21</sup> For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. <sup>22</sup> Now if I am to go on living in the body, this will mean productive work for me, yet I don't know which I prefer: <sup>23</sup> I feel torn between the two, because I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, <sup>24</sup> but it is more vital for your sake that I remain in the body. <sup>25</sup> And since I am sure of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for the sake of your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that what you can be proud of may increase because of me in Christ Jesus, when I come back to you.

<sup>27</sup> Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ so that—whether I come and see you or whether I remain absent—I should hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, by contending side by side for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and by not being intimidated in any way by your opponents. This is a sign of their destruction, but of your salvation—a sign which is from God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him, <sup>30</sup> since you are encountering the same conflict that you saw me face and now hear that I am facing.

#### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Hopefully, throughout our brief time in this study so far, you've understood the priority of sharing the gospel. If you feel burdened to share, but don't know how, the qr code will help with a very simple gospel presentation. In addition, first pray for the person with whom you want to share. Commit to praying for those around you. Second, be bold and ask if you can tell them about the good news that changed your life. Third, don't forget to ask them if they want it too.



### DISCUSSION

Describe a time when you felt like quitting? How did it turn out?

1. What was Paul's preference in suffering for the gospel and why? (21-24)

2. What traits did Paul link to a life "worthy of the gospel?"

3. In your own words, what does it mean to live a life worthy of the gospel? (27a)

4. Summarize Paul's goals for their community. (27b)

5. What 2-3 people are you praying for to see come to faith in Jesus? How can your group encourage you?

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

It has been said that you are either a missionary or a mission field. Maybe you have questions about receiving the gospel or sharing it with others. Either way, talk to your coach today.

## STUDY NOTES CAN'T LOSE

You may remember the TV show, *Friday Night Lights*, about a fictional football team from Texas. In the show, the Dillion Panthers football team shouted the iconic rally cry, “Clear eyes, full hearts, can’t lose.” And as far as high school rally cries go, that’s pretty good.

As Paul sits imprisoned in Rome, he’s been through a lot—shipwreck, interrogations, physical and verbal abuse. In one instance, he was stoned and drug to the outskirts of the city because they thought he was dead. Other disciples came to him, he got up, and went back into the city (Acts 14:19–20). Again, if *anybody* had a reason to give up, it was Paul. So, what’s the secret? Today’s passage couldn’t be clearer; in Christ, we can’t lose no matter what opposition we face.

## THE GOSPEL ADVANCES BY FOCUSING ON ETERNITY

Paul had clear eyes; he had the perspective to understand his situation in light of eternity. He declared, **“My confident hope is that I will in no way be ashamed but that with complete boldness, even now as always, Christ will be exalted in my body, whether I live or die.”** Paul’s hope wasn’t wishful thinking. It was eager expectation. He joyfully understood that living or dying made no difference because Christ will be exalted. This inspired, not just boldness, but “complete boldness” (literally “all boldness”).

I think if we could brainstorm the three best words we *want* to describe us, “confident,” “unashamed,” and “bold” would rank high on that list. I know they sure would for me. Notice, however, that the source of those descriptions wasn’t Paul himself. Paul focused on the exalted Christ. Only through Christ can one proclaim, **“living is Christ and dying is gain.”** Now that’s clear eyes.

Paul also described the source of his full heart—**joy in the faith**. Paul rejoiced at the Philippians **progress**, but he also wanted them to **be proud** of him **in Christ Jesus** when he returned.

Paul recognized the power of a team and the joy that comes from mutual success. Joy comes from the perspective and hope we’ve already discussed, but it’s best expressed through a team. Like many other examples of the Fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5, we experience true joy only through a relationship with Christ. However, we express joy in relationship with one another. Individually,

you must **conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**. But as a team, **I should hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, by contending side by side for the faith of the gospel**.

## UNITY WITH OTHERS ADVANCES THE GOSPEL

Right here we find a good definition for “unity,” that is “contending side by side.” You cannot have a vibrant, growing, effective relationship with the Lord alone. Independence is not the goal. You are not more spiritual by skipping church, your small group, or this study. You cannot conquer your school for Christ without standing shoulder to shoulder with one another. **Opponents** may rise but with clear eyes and full hearts, as we see in Paul’s example, your team can’t lose.

Opposition to the work of the gospel in your life **is a sign of their destruction, but of your salvation—a sign which is from God**. If you’re living for Christ without opposition, as my relatives would say, “Ya’ain’t doin’ it right.” **For it has been granted to you not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him, since you are encountering the same conflict that you saw me face and now hear that I am facing**. This doesn’t mean we go looking for a fight, but the gospel offends people who don’t want to hear it. If you share it, you can expect opposition. However, when you have a team “contending side by side,” no opposition can win.

Going back to the question from the introduction, “Why not you?” Are you going to get out-worked in living for Christ? Are you going to let fear of failure hold you back? Are you going to let things get in the way of your commitment to your team?

I recently heard the testimony of a man who came to Christ in high school. His English teacher shared the gospel with him and it disturbed his soul. That night, by himself, he prayed to receive Christ. The next day he went to share the good news with his best friend hoping that he would trust Christ too. His friend was glad for him, but said he’d been a Christian for years.

He and this friend had been in a bad car crash months before from which they fortunately walked away. When hearing that his friend was a Christian, anger arose in him. Immediately, he realized that they could have died that night and spent an eternity in different places. Determined for that not to be true of him, this guy shared the gospel with *everyone* in his school. Frustration grew discovering all the Christians around him that were too cowardly to share.

Many of the people you call “friend” don’t know Jesus. They need to know. Why not you?