

[JOY] Gospel Advance: The Christian Perspective for Glory

Philippians 1:12-18b

MPS Christ-followers hold a Jesus-centered perspective on all of life so their whole life can serve to advance the gospel.

OBJ Every Christian can understand that advancing the gospel with their life means addressing the three biggest threats with one power.

INTRO Have ever stopped to consider what shapes your perspective of the way you see everything in this world? I ate at a restaurant recently and wanted pizza, but they only served it on cauliflower crust. News Flash: cauliflower is NOT pizza crust, but I ordered it anyway. It was HORRIBLE! Not the pizza crust, it was awesome, I ate it all! My perspective is that cauliflower as pizza crust is horrible, just unnecessary, should never be! I've gone back just to make sure.

TRANS A Jesus-centered perspective on all of life is essential for every Christian to serve and advance the gospel with joy.

READ Philippians 1:12-18b

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Philippians 1:12-18b

After Paul and Silas were released from prison, they were asked to leave town.^{Acts16:35-40} Paul demanded the magistrates come take them out because he was a Roman citizen and they had beaten them unjustly, which was against Roman law. They came and apologized and asked them to leave the city. Acts 17 records government leaders exacting a bribe to let them go, and riots breaking out over their preaching. In Acts 18 Paul is in Corinth where a mob beat a man in front of the ruler who paid no attention to it. In Acts 19, Paul is in Ephesus where great gospel advancements were made into the city, but the Jews rejected him, ending again in another riot. By Acts 21, Paul returned to Jerusalem but is arrested due to rioting and mob violence. When arrested he appeals one last time to the Jewish leaders, but they plotted to kill him. The situation became so intense that the Roman guards had to keep him safe for trial. They escorted him back to Rome with 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen.^{Acts23:23-24} Paul was not attempting to stop his unjust treatment, but God told him in a dream that he would appear before Caesar.^{Acts23:11} Paul was on mission to preach the gospel to Caesar. Once back in Rome, he is kept under arrest until his trial before Caesar. In Rome imprisonment he writes this letter to the Philippians, approximately a decade after planting the church in Philippi. **And after all of this, what does he say?** *"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,"*¹² Everything that happened to Paul confirmed his gospel work, instead of contradicting it.

Paul stayed focused on obeying God and advancing the gospel. He saw the many ways God was working and how the gospel was taking hold in people all along the way, and he was not going to allow anything to threaten or stop the work. Every person's life perspective is shaped in one of two ways; either everything in life is shaped by your understanding of God, or everything in life will shape your view of God. What you allow to shape your perspective of all things will determine the source from which you draw joy and strength for life. **The joy of the Lord becomes your strength to endure any situation when Jesus centers your perspective to see your whole life for His glory.**

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TRANS Holding a Jesus-centered perspective of all of life is not easy. Countless attacks threaten to steal our focus on Jesus every day. But none can stop the gospel from advancing unless it steals our focus.

OBJ **Three Biggest Threats to Gospel Advance in your life.**

Threat #1. Circumstances that are not surrendered to God. .12-14



Paul certainly had every opportunity to let his circumstances distract and convince him “enough is enough”, but instead he testified, “*what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel*”. Paul was not denying the difficulty of, the hardship, pain, or frustration of anything he endured. He is simply testifying that in and through it all, God worked and used them to advance the gospel. And these are not hollow, hyper-spiritual claims. This was the testimony everyone was hearing; Paul’s persecution was for the sake of the gospel.

A life centered on Jesus stays focused on the Lord’s commission and doesn’t get distracted by circumstances. This doesn’t mean we are not aware of nor to say that we never struggle with circumstances. But in any and every situation, we look to the Lord and surrender them all to Him. The way we look at and understand our life, and all the circumstances of it, reveal what we are trusting in our life. Circumstances become so easy to focus on, and be distracted or consumed by, but when we do, we are looking for hope in our situation instead of trusting the Lord to be sufficient in every situation. Hebrews 12:2 reminds us that Jesus responded to his worst circumstances by what he stayed focused on, “*looking to Jesus, ...who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*”

Sometimes God uses hard circumstances to identify an area of our life or heart that is not fully surrendered to Him. At other times He uses them to show that His power is sufficient. But in every circumstance, regardless of how He chooses to work, God always proves that He is faithful when we stay focused on Him. It’s okay to struggle in your circumstances, to not like or enjoy your circumstances. God wants you to tell Him, to talk to Him about it, to cast ALL your ‘cares’ because He cares for you. None of these mean you are focused on your circumstances. But do not allow your circumstances to cause you to question and doubt Him! **We can only know the faithfulness and joy of the Lord when we surrender our circumstances to Him, to work by the power of the gospel.**

APPL **When was the last time you looked at what was happening to you and considered how your circumstances are advancing the gospel?** We too often tend to think only of what our circumstances are doing to me, and not FOR the gospel.

Paul’s circumstances had a distinct effect. First, it became known throughout the whole imperial guard and to others that his imprisonment was for Christ. **How did people know it was for Christ?** Paul testified to Him in the midst of his circumstances. And it also affected other believers, but not in the way you might think. Paul says the brothers became more confident in the Lord because of his imprisonment. And this courage led them to be bolder to speak the word without fear. **When we stay focused on the gospel, we look to the Lord Jesus to consider how He is impacting others through our circumstances.**

TRANS The next two threats may not be as obvious, but they are no less dangerous to distract us from gospel advance.

READ Phil 1.15-18b

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

There were plenty who opposed Paul. And these were people who claimed to be on the same team. Some didn’t like Paul because they were jealous of his gifts, ability, boldness, or success (*envy*). Some didn’t like Paul because they saw him as competition (*rivalry*). Paul says they were fueled by selfish ambition. They reveled in Paul’s hardships because they thought it helped them in some way. **TRANS** This brings us to our second threat to gospel advance in life.

Threat #2. Competition in what you do for God. .15a

There were people who wanted to compete with Paul for no reason other than to fulfill a selfish ambition. They claimed to do the same work as Paul, but their focus was less on the work and more on how bad Paul’s circumstances became. Every sermon was to make them look better and Paul to look worse. Every encounter was to build themselves up by tearing him down. No limit or amount was ever enough; the worse Paul’s circumstances got the greater they counted their success. They were so focused on self that seeing Paul destroyed was more important than people converted or the gospel advanced. Self-ambition caused them to measure their success by celebrating Paul’s suffering.



We can easily get distracted by this same threat when we are not focused on Jesus and serving the gospel. You might say, “But I am not a preacher. How could this affect me?” It is no different for any Christian. You feel threatened or insecure about some role, accomplishment, or situation in life, so you measure yourself against someone that you see as much better than you. And every time they stumble or fall, or have any struggle, you celebrate it in your heart. The area of life around which this selfishness centers identifies what is most desired by you, and subsequently insecure in you. A young mom is envious of other mothers that she perceives as better than her. A person enjoys it when a co-worker makes a mistake at work because they feel threatened by them. This pattern gets repeated in any aspect of life where you feel insecure, insignificant, or insufficient; looks, smarts, ability, gifts, etc. And the problem is not how good they are or even how bad you are, but where you perceive yourself in regard to where or how you see them. The issue is that your identity or significance is not surrendered to Jesus. The person you compete with in your heart is not the issue, they are only the object of your envy and jealousy. IF they go away, you find someone else to attach your target to. The pattern repeats itself because your heart is set on selfish ambition and consumed by some unmet need, ill-formed desire, or ill-conceived imperfection in you. And you don’t have to improve to advance, it is even better when they stumble, fail or suffer in any way. You feel better about yourself when what you consider as bad happens to them. [When self is your focus, envy and jealousy fuel you because until your appetite of selfish ambition is satisfied, you must keep competing.](#)

TRANS This competition from envy and jealousy has another very similar expression.

Threat #3. Comparison in how you serve God. .15b

Paul says of the second kind of person, “*but others from good will.*” They “*do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.*” This group served in agreement with Paul’s work, though not alongside Paul in his work. But the threat is that the way they see Paul affects the way they see themselves. He always has a little more success, a little bigger platform, a little bigger audience, or better results. They ask, “**Why is he always the one to get noticed or arrested?**” It is so twisted, and you know that, but you still feel a certain way about yourself because of it. You don’t hate the other person because of this, often quite the opposite, you love them dearly, but you do hate yourself because of the way you see them. [Comparison is a killer because your focus is set on how you compare to others instead of your faithfulness to Christ’s commands and commission. You are never satisfied and only know pseudo joy because you never measure up to...you.](#)

Comparison kills because of what you believe about or how you think about yourself. The infection of comparison is that it will not even allow you to enjoy any good in life, because you don’t think you are worthy. You have too much improvement to make, too much work to accomplish before you should be enjoying anything. When you stop comparing yourself, you are set free to enjoy the blessing and benefit of others, their personhood, gifting, and strengths, and recognize how their service along with yours, and others, strengthens the whole. [The only way you will ever stop the comparison game is to repent and submit yourself fully, your insecurity, insufficiency, or insignificance, to Jesus through the gospel.](#)

Competition and comparison are twin threats that often follow closely together. But they are not something specific only to an individual, but indicative of sin. When you fail to rest in God’s love you will always live striving to get ahead of others. When you refuse to trust God’s grace, you are always measuring yourself against those you think have it all together or hating yourself because you don’t have it all together. The real threat with compete and compare is that in time, when you are so weary from loathing and self-hate, you will turn to self-protect and blame God. [Competition and comparison are both rooted in self-centeredness and will only be conquered by centering your life on Jesus and obedience to Him by faith.](#)

TRANS These threats undermine the gospel’s work in your life by sin’s constant barrage against your heart, wanting to draw you away, drive you away or deter you from the work of the gospel in your life, and your faithful witness. But Paul demonstrates that you do not have to give in to them. [Jesus supplied Paul’s joy and the gospel his power to remain faithful.](#)

ONE Power for Gospel Advance: Faithful Witness

When any of these threats arise, we think, “I need to talk to someone.” This is right, but often not in the way we think. Against every threat, Paul held a gospel-focused perspective of how God was working in people and how His mission was advancing through them, so that he continued to preach and share the gospel so its power would continue to work. One



commentator writes, “this passage shows that when our joy is connected to the advancement of the gospel rather than to our physical condition or to the responses of other people to us, it remains firm, even when these circumstances stand against us.”¹ Sharing the gospel everywhere he went was the power that advanced the gospel in all circumstances, at all times, through all people. The power he shared was the power by which he lived. He didn’t wait for the right time, he made every time right for the gospel. When faced with any threat against the gospel advancing in your life, faithfulness in sharing remains your one call and the only sufficient power to overcome any obstacle or threat to focus your perspective and empower your faith. The gospel empowered Paul as he confronted every threat by a faithful witness in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ everywhere he went. [Sharing the gospel keeps you focused to remain faithful to Jesus in hard circumstances, against attackers and accusers, and from an infliction of self-focus.](#)

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CLOSE [Is there anything hindering the gospel from advancing in you?](#)

¹ Frank Thielman, [Philippians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 66.

