



# CAPITOL COMMISSION

## The Hindrance-Driven Life—Philippians 1.12-14

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PHILIPPIANS: CULTIVATING A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE AT THE CAPITOL

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### INTRODUCTION

“Either jump in here and help or get out of the way.” If you haven’t said it, you have probably at least thought it. When faced with a vital task we hope others will see its importance and jump in whole-heartedly to help, but at the very least we hope they would stay out of our way. Yet a significant project seldom goes as planned and most of us have seen critical work hindered by obstinacy, obstruction, or opposition from others.

There is no greater project than the proclamation of the gospel—the very work to which the Apostle Paul had been called. How frustrating it could have been for him to face the hindrances that first stifled and then seemed to terminate his life’s mission. Yet, Paul’s perspective here demonstrates the understanding that God’s means for advancing the gospel are often the very things that, humanly speaking, would hinder it.

This week’s study, entitled The Hindrance-Driven Life, we consider the progress of the gospel in relation to the persuasion of unbelievers and the partnership of believers

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*Philippians 1.12-14—But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

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### I. HINDRANCE-DRIVEN PROGRESS (12)

Paul writes out of concern that these friends might despair at the news that had reached them of his troubles. Emphatic in challenging their evaluation of his circumstances, he seeks to dispel the gloomy conclusions they had reached regarding them.

### THE HINDRANCES OF PAUL’S CIRCUMSTANCES

Without a doubt, there was little to celebrate regarding Paul’s situation from a worldly perspective. Having been imprisoned on trumped-up charges, he was chained to a guard every waking moment, his life hanging in the balance as he awaited the ruling of a capricious dictator, a ruling that would come without relation to any clear schedule. Paul’s whereabouts and companions were not of his own choosing. Paul had suffered beatings, stoning, shipwreck, and on and on the story goes. If anyone had a right to say, “Enough already!” it was Paul.

### THE PROGRESS OF PAUL’S CIRCUMSTANCES

Yet, in the midst of such dark circumstances, Paul writes a letter that oozed joy. Why? Because he saw great progress in the advance of the gospel!

The word here for progress had its roots in a term describing the work of “cutters” who would open the way through the forests for the marching army. They led the way for the army by cutting down that which might hinder their progress. What a perspective for Paul to have. His circumstances were not a hindrance to the advance of the gospel. On the contrary, they were the means by which every hindrance was being cut down so that the gospel might continue her march forward.

### II. HINDRANCE-BASED PREACHING (13)

Paul first cites the spread of the gospel among those commissioned to guard him until his case is decided as cause for his positive assessment of his situation.

### THE RECIPIENTS OF PAUL’S PREACHING

These guards were specialists, most often, chosen to this honored post for some feat of bravery in battle. These were the Green Berets of the Roman Army—the Special Forces of their day. It is understood that in time the Praetorian Guard

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### BIBLE STUDIES (MEALS PROVIDED)

LEGISLATORS ONLY: WEDNESDAY @ LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30A.M. OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS EARLIER) OR THURSDAYS @ 7:30 A.M. IN THE MEMBERS’ LOUNGE (E2.1002)

CAPITOL COMMUNITY (ALL ARE WELCOME): FRIDAYS @ 8:00A.M. IN THE MEMBERS’ LOUNGE (E2.1002)

## The Hindrance-Driven Life—Philippians 1.12-14

became so powerful that the emperors themselves were inclined to court the favor of these soldiers.

This peculiar prisoner had gotten the attention of the whole palace guard. In six hour shifts these elite Roman soldiers sat chained to Paul. These guards over-heard his fervent prayers, his training in the Scriptures with believers who visited with him, and, likely, spent time themselves engaging in discussion of their own spiritual condition in the plainest of terms. In God's economy, the tables were turned and the captor became Paul's captive audience. Paul took the liberty which was now his to proclaim the gospel to the whole palace guard.

### THE CONFIRMATION OF PAUL'S PREACHING

Through that which happened to Paul it had become manifestly clear to the whole palace guard that he was no criminal. The charges alleged against him stemmed from his dedication to the person of Christ and the message he called the gospel. It was apparent to these soldiers that he was there for a reason that transcended Roman law. His chains were in Christ.

### III. HINDRANCE-INSPIRED PARTNERSHIP (14)

Second, Paul cites, as cause for his positive assessment of his situation, the revived partnership in the gospel gained among most of the brothers who had been made bold by his chains.

### CONTEXT FOR PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

When trying to persuade someone—to lead them, to sell them, or to teach them—there is something very powerful in putting things in a “real life” context. To tell a child that the water is fine and invite them to jump in is one thing, but to dip one's own foot in or even to jump in ahead of them is another. The latter provides much greater confidence and is much more persuasive.

That is why Paul's situation has been so helpful to “most of the brethren” in making them confident to share the gospel. It is much less of a leap for us to do something if we first have

the opportunity to observe someone practicing it in its natural context. Much of life is imitation. There is nothing wrong in this as long as we imitate the right things. Paul wrote in another place, “imitate me as I imitate Christ.”

### CONFIDENCE FOR PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

There is a piling up of language here to communicate the idea of confidence—“having become confident,” “much more bold,” “without fear.” We gain passion, boldness, and confidence of those whom we follow. Paul's unflinching boldness to share the gospel has impassioned every believer who heard of it. These fellow believers became fearless partners in the gospel.

### CONCLUSION

Paul wrote his friends to tell them that the “*things which happened*” to him had advanced the spread of the gospel; that it had become clear to others that his “*chains*” were in Christ; and that others had become confident by his “*chains*.” Paul is not trying to dance around the negative here. He is not looking for the silver lining or trying to find the positive in a bad situation. He is emphatic in presenting his trials, specifically, his chains as being instrumental in God's effective working through him as a minister of the gospel.

We must not turn this passage into some self-help teaching about making lemonade from the lemons life gives you. This is about rejoicing in the power and wisdom of God even in His allowing what seem to be hindrances into our lives. It is about recognizing God's ability to take the difficulties, problems, and, even, opposition we encounter and turning it to the advantage of the gospel cause. This isn't just thinking positive. This is about seeing the most unwelcome developments in our lives from God's eternal perspective and recognizing in these troubles the great advantage gained for the sake of the gospel.