

# furthering the gospel

## SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 1:8–12

## BUILDUP THEME



BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

God makes joyous those who live to further the gospel.

## MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will evaluate how God is working to further the gospel through them.

## MEMORY VERSE

“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (Philippians 1:18).

## Teacher Preparation

- Read Philippians 1:12–18. Paul identified his rivals in some of his epistles, focusing on those who tried to destroy the gospel’s message. Those rivals weren’t believers. In Rome a group of believers identified Paul as their rival, but the feeling wasn’t mutual. Paul saw fellow believers as team members rather than rivals. He concluded the gospel message is too important to worry about getting credit for converts. In the end, Paul rejoiced that those envious of him preached Christ with their lips even though their motives were impure.
- The previous session dealt with a believer’s love and sincerity. Those who serve God for selfish reasons serve Him insincerely. Their service may be effective, but they won’t get the credit for their success, at least not in the end while standing before Christ’s judgment seat. Their earthly recognition and self-congratulation will be their reward.
- Paul looked behind his long list of hardships and present imprisonment to see God’s hand at work. He trusted God’s goodness and sovereignty and adopted as his life’s ambition God’s goal to further the gospel. Consequently, God filled Paul with joy. Challenge your learners to see the opportunity of God’s furtherance of the gospel through them. Remind them that joining God in His gospel work is part of joying like Jesus. Jesus joyed when He voluntarily gave His life and endured the penalty for sin to make salvation possible (Heb. 12:1, 2).

## Session Summary

Paul endured hardships on his journey from Jerusalem to Rome. Yet Paul didn’t fret or accuse God of being unloving. He accepted God’s will for his life because he believed God was working to further the gospel. He was right. Once he arrived in Rome and settled into his house arrest, he gained an opportunity to evangelize the Praetorium, Nero’s palace guard. His godly response to his chains persuaded the Roman believers to share Christ boldly. Some witnessed out of love for Paul and Christ while others witnessed for selfish reasons. Either way, Paul rejoiced that Christ was preached and souls were saved.



# Session Starters

## Option 1—Furtherance Acrostic

### Gather

- Whiteboard and markers.

### Steps

1. Write the word “furtherance” vertically down the whiteboard. Have learners use the word as an acrostic, adding words or short phrases to identify what people in general live to further. Their answers should start with or include one of the letters in “furtherance.” Sample answers include **F**itness, **R**etirement savings, **E**ducation, and **A**ntique collection.

2. Discuss the learners’ answers.

**ASK:** Which of the answers do you actively endeavor to further?

**ASK:** To what lengths have you gone to further them?

**ASK:** What is your motivation behind furthering them?

3. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul’s endeavor in Rome was the furtherance of the gospel. His obsession with spreading the good news helped him lay aside what any “normal” person would seek to further. In fact, we will see he endured many hardships to further the gospel. And in the end, he experienced great joy.

## Option 2—“Chainging” Circumstances

### Gather

- Lengths of metal chain or paper chains.
- Zip ties or string.

### Steps

1. Ask for two or three pairs of volunteers. Make sure you have married couples or men with men and women with women. Chain each pair together. Using the zip ties or string to fasten the chain to one of the wrists of each partner.

2. Discuss the reality of being chained to another person.

**ASK:** How did your ambitions change once you were chained to another person?

**ASK:** How long would you go before you began to complain?

**ASK:** What words would you use to describe life chained to another person?

3. Release the partners and transition to the Bible lesson.

The apostle Paul lived for two years chained to sweaty, smelly Romans guards. His reality drastically changed but his ambitions remained exactly the same. No matter what happened to him, he kept his eye on the furtherance of the gospel. This session will challenge us to make the furtherance of the gospel our ambition too, no matter how our circumstances change.

## Bible Study

### Gather

- Resource 48-R3.

Having just prayed for the Philippians, Paul began his formal address to them by putting his current situation into context. As such, there are several parallels between his prayer requests for the Philippians and his life experience. He serves as an excellent example of the kind of life he prayed the Philippians would develop. He is also an excellent example of what it means to live for the furtherance of the gospel.

### I. God Worked to Further the Gospel (Phil. 1:12)

#### A. God used opposition

**READ:** Philippians 1:12. **ASK:** What do you recall about the “things” that had happened to Paul to get him to Rome? (Use the commentary below to expound on the learners’ answers.)

God used the scheming and plotting of His opponents to launch Paul’s trip to Rome. After Paul returned to Jerusalem following his third missionary journey, the Jews falsely accused him of desecrating the temple. They aroused the whole city against him, leading to his unfounded arrest. When the Roman military commander learned of a plot to ambush and kill Paul, he transported Paul to Caesarea for an audience with Governor Felix. Soon the Jewish elders and high priest arrived with a lawyer and made their accusations. Felix postponed the proceedings for two years, hoping for a bribe from Paul. Finally, the Jews requested that Paul be sent back to Jerusalem for trial, plotting to ambush and kill him as he traveled. Paul appealed his case to Caesar to avoid a return to Jerusalem (Acts 21:17—27:32).

All these events were part of the “things” Paul endured. These “things”

eventually led to the furtherance of the gospel in Rome. Of course, behind human opposition to God and His people stands Satan, whom God consistently frustrates. What plans Satan intends for destruction, God can use to further the gospel.

**ASK:** When have you recognized that God used His opposition to further the gospel?

## B. God used creation

Once Paul began his voyage to Rome, the “things” that led to the furtherance of the gospel continued, except this time the obstacles came from creation. En route to Rome, Paul’s ship was tossed for fourteen days in a terrible storm and then wrecked on the island of Malta. In the midst of the storm, God sent an angel to encourage Paul, promising him God would get him safely to Rome to testify before Caesar. Paul then encouraged the rest of the passengers to trust God’s promise of safety and follow His plan to preserve their lives. God worked to protect all the passengers as they followed God’s specific instructions to escape the powerful storm (Acts 27).

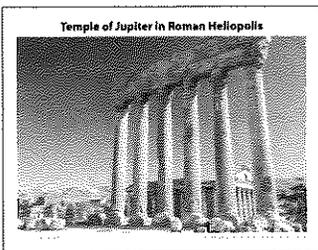
So why did God send a severe storm to buffet Paul’s ship? The answer has to do with Roman religion. In the first century, the Romans worshiped the mythological god Jupiter as their chief deity. They believed Jupiter was the grandfather of the mythological Romulus, the supposed founder of Rome. According to the Romans, Jupiter ruled the sky and controlled the weather. They even depicted him with a lightning bolt in one of his hands. So they would have believed Jupiter controlled the storm that tossed Paul’s ship around for two weeks.

**DISPLAY:** Resource 48-R3. The set of 65-foot tall, 8-foot wide columns is all that remains of the temple built to Jupiter in what is now the country of Lebanon, just north of Israel. The temple was finished at about the time Paul was writing to Philippi. It is the largest temple to Jupiter in antiquity. Its position so far from Rome shows the pervasive influence Rome had on its empire’s religion.

**ASK:** What would the Romans have expected to happen to Paul in a severe, “Jupiter-controlled” storm? *Likely they would have expected Paul to be killed because of his opposition to Jupiter and other pagan gods.*

The storm gave Paul a personal illustration of God’s sovereign control over the weather and God’s power to save lives. The snakebite Paul survived on Malta further illustrated God’s power to protect His own and control nature (Acts 28:1–10).

In Rome, Paul spent time among pagan worshipers of Jupiter. He must have often shared his shipwreck account with those who were convinced there was no stronger god than Jupiter. Paul reflected with



48-R3

gratitude on the “these things” that were part of his journey to Rome because they opened doors to the furtherance of the gospel.

**ASK:** When has God used the weather or other uncomfortable circumstances to further the gospel through your life or the life of a fellow believer?

## **II. Paul Lived to Further the Gospel (Phil. 1:13–17)**

### **A. He exemplified commitment (1:13)**

Paul didn’t sulk while under house arrest in Rome. He still had a calling from God. He continued to serve the Lord and take advantage of opportunities to share the gospel with his “captive” audience.

**READ:** Philippians 1:13.

Paul spent his days chained to members of the palace guard. The guards were part of a unit of carefully selected soldiers, called the Praetorium, who served Nero. The soldiers took turns by Paul’s side and were therefore present while Paul wrote letters to churches, conversed with guests, prayed, studied Scriptures, and gave instructions to the church leaders in Rome.

Paul endured house arrest because he wouldn’t waver from his commitment to Christ. And though being under house arrest was certainly better than being chained in a prison, Paul’s life wasn’t easy.

**ASK:** What challenges did Paul endure while being chained to soldiers for two years? *Spiritually, Paul had to be a good testimony every waking moment or risk undermining his witness; mentally, he had no privacy and had to constantly guard his speech lest the soldiers accuse him of treason; physically, he felt the constant and annoying weight of the chains.*

Based on Paul’s outstanding testimony, the soldiers and others in Nero’s household concluded Paul was under arrest for being a devoted Christian rather than a dangerous criminal or insurrectionist. His chains, then, were part of his commitment to Christ. Paul knew by experience that those committed to live for Christ will share in Christ’s suffering (2 Tim. 3:11, 12).

**ASK:** How does your commitment to Christ show to those who rub shoulders with you?

Paul gladly lived out his commitment to Christ every day through the power of the Spirit in him. And even though he couldn’t leave his house, his faith in Christ spread throughout Rome.

### **B. He encouraged missions (1:14)**

Believers who visited Paul reported to the church in Rome his commitment to Christ despite his circumstances.

**READ:** Philippians 1:14.

Paul's testimony encouraged the Roman believers to share the gospel even though they faced the risk of being locked up themselves. Nero was one of the harshest emperors the early church endured. In just a year or two after Paul wrote Philippians, Nero blamed the burning of Rome on the Christians and began to persecute them more severely. Shortly after the persecution intensified, Mark wrote his Gospel to encourage the Roman believers who had been initially strengthened by Paul's testimony and faced imprisonment or death for their faith in Christ.

Pagan Romans believed they dominated the world because their gods showed them favor. So to preach the gospel in the city of Rome meant disrupting the hub of the pagan teachings that had permeated the Roman Empire. Yet the Roman believers preached about the one true God with newfound courage being persuaded by Paul's chains that suffering for Christ is a natural and even welcome part of the Christian life.

The construction of Paul's sentence seems to suggest the phrase "in the Lord" goes with the verb "become confident." In the Greek sentence, "in the Lord" is set before the verb to make the phrase emphatic. So Paul emphatically points to the Lord as the primary reason that "his chains" gave the Philippians courage.

**ASK:** Whose example has encouraged you to serve God courageously?

### **C. He emphasized motives (1:15–17)**

Paul shifted tone in verse 15 and 16, demonstrating that all wasn't perfect in the Roman church. Some of the believers had problems with their motives for evangelizing. That Paul addressed it in his letter to the Philippians means some of them may have had similar struggles.

Philippian believers who served God for wrong reasons must have been pricked in their consciences when they read Paul's prayer for them in verse 10. Paul clearly instructed the Philippians to be sincere till the day of Christ. And when Paul revisited motives starting in verse 15, he underscored their importance in a believer's service to God.

**READ:** Philippians 1:15, 16.

Some Roman believers were preaching out of envy, using Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to gain personal prestige and pats on the back. They probably had previous disagreements with Paul. Now, with Paul confined and physically out of the picture, they could gain more popularity for themselves while diminishing Paul's influence. By freely preaching while Paul was in bonds, they meant to add to his distress, perhaps thinking Paul would be upset that others had taken

attention away from his preaching. They assumed all believers viewed each other as competition rather than team members.

**ASK:** How might believers respond to feelings of jealousy toward those with strong ministry abilities? *They could praise God for the person and seek to learn from him or her; try to outdo the person to steal some of his or her thunder; undermine the person's ministry by criticism or slander.*

Those who preached Christ with wrong motives failed to add affliction to Paul's chains. Paul never cared about who got credit for evangelistic success so long as the gospel continued to impact lives. God gave the increase as Paul and others were faithful to share the gospel (1 Cor. 3:1–10). If anything added affliction to Paul's chains it was the Roman's insincerity, not their success. Paul loved all the Roman believers and wanted all of them to have a good report at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11–15).

Some of the Roman believers preached Christ because they wanted to pick up the slack left by Paul's house arrest. The more faithful and effective they were in spreading the gospel around Rome, the more Paul rejoiced.

**READ:** Philippians 1:15, 17.

Those with pure motives weren't concerned about accolades or applause. They witnessed so the lost might trust in Christ. They loved God more than themselves and consequently elevated the needs of the lost above their own. They also recognized Paul's divinely orchestrated opportunity to defend the gospel before Nero. They wanted to do all they could to support and encourage him.

**ASK:** What characterizes the gospel presentations of those who love Christ? *The presentations are characterized by joy, genuineness, enthusiasm, and compassion.*

Paul wanted the Philippians to be like the latter group, those who preach Christ because they love God and love others. God obviously wants us to serve Him out of love for Him and those we serve. Remembering our personal evaluation before Christ in Heaven should motivate us to serve God sincerely.

### **III. Paul Rejoiced in the Gospel's Furtherance (Phil. 1:18)**

Despite Paul's house arrest and the sinful motives on the part of some of the Roman believers, the gospel still spread and impacted lives. For this Paul rejoiced.

**READ:** Philippians 1:18.

What causes a person to rejoice speaks to that person's perspective on

life. Paul rejoiced in the gospel's furtherance because he looked at life from God's perspective. He viewed all of humanity in relation to their eternal destinies. And he viewed his own life as a limited opportunity to make an eternal impact on others by spreading the gospel and discipling believers. Viewing life from God's perspective caused Paul to conclude his life was moving along swimmingly. Christ was building His church through Paul and other Roman believers as they surrendered to the Holy Spirit's enabling power.

**ASK:** What causes you to rejoice?

**ASK:** What do your reasons for joy reveal about your perspective on life?

## Session Application

### Gather

- Whiteboard and markers.

### Steps

1. Encourage your learners to be concerned about the furtherance of the gospel.

**ASK:** How concerned are you about the furtherance of the gospel? How might you increase your concern?

**ASK:** How confident are you in sharing the gospel? What mentoring or training might help you boost your confidence?

2. List on the board the outreach ministries your church conducts.

**ASK:** Which of your church's programs or functions could you join to help the gospel spread?

**ASK:** What new outreach ministries might you help start?

3. Pray for your class to make the furtherance of the gospel a high priority in their lives. Pray also for God to lead your class to do something together to reach the lost for Christ.

# living for Christ

## SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 1:19–26

## BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

Christ wants us to live for Him so we might glorify Him, know joy, and anticipate meeting Him.

## MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will evaluate whether they live for Christ.

## MEMORY VERSE

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

## Teacher Preparation

- Read Philippians 1:21. Paul summed up his life in this one simple verse. He had dedicated his life to Christ and was confident he would see and be like Christ when he died. So he viewed his imprisonment and coming trial from Christ’s perspective. He saw his trial as an opportunity to magnify Christ.
- When faced with uncomfortable circumstances, our natural desire is to escape the situation and put an end to our suffering. But we aren’t called to live by what comes natural. If we are to know Christ’s joy then we must live for His glory. Instead of looking for a way of escape, we ought to look for a way to glorify Christ in the Spirit’s power.
- This session will challenge your learners to consider what defines their lives. What would Philippians 1:21 look like for them if they were honest? There are many “good” answers to put in the place of Christ, but none of them are adequate and none of them ultimately help us joy like Jesus.

## Session Summary

Paul rejoiced to know God had worked all things for the furtherance of the gospel in Rome. Paul, though, hadn’t yet testified before Nero. Not knowing his verdict, he pivoted in his letter to address his perspective on his imprisonment and coming trial. As he waited, he counted on the Philippians’ prayers and the Holy Spirit’s power to help him glorify Christ through his trial. In presenting his trial’s two possible outcomes—his release or execution—Paul remained confident he would be released to help the Philippians progress in their faith in Christ, though he anticipated someday joining Christ in Heaven.