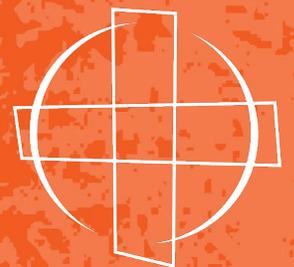


APRIL  
2022

Donald J. Wills  
*Senior Pastor*

**FOLLOW**



ADULT CONNECT  
CLASS CURRICULUM

The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to ***introduce*** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, ***instruct*** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, ***inspire*** them to serve for God's kingdom, and ***incorporate*** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

## A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

What is the single most pivotal event in human history? Some people might suggest the moment and time the US entered World War II. Others may mention the election of a particular President or another world leader. Another part of the population may point to a particular invention like the wheel or automobile. However, there is one event that eclipses all others combined and that is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This month on Sunday, April 17th, we will celebrate once again this single most important event. He IS risen!

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God's Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

The resurrection sets Christianity apart from all other religions. True Christianity is about the true gospel of Jesus Christ - His death, His burial, His resurrection and His return. Paul penned it well in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" But then he proclaims with absolute certainty in verse 20, "But now IS Christ risen from the dead."

-Blessings  
Pastor Don



## *Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively*

### *Introduce*

**Day 1:** Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Instruct*

**Day 2:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

**Day 3:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Inspire*

**Day 4:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned in your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

### *Incorporate*

**Day 5:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

**Day 6:** Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

**Day 7:** Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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Follow by Participating

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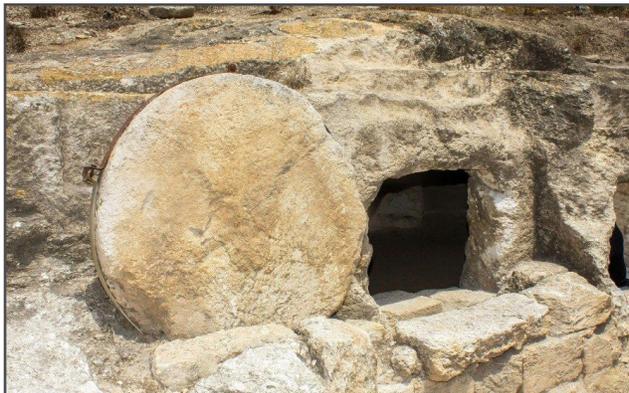


**April 10, 2022**

Follow Him who  
Paid the Price

**[Matthew 27:11-56](#)**

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Follow Prudently

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**April 24, 2022**

Follow by Proclaiming

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25th

PASTORAL ANNIVERSARY

*Pastor Donald J. Wills*

PLEASE JOIN US ON SATURDAY, APRIL 9  
FOR AN OPEN HOUSE DESSERT RECEPTION  
IN HONOR OF  
PASTOR DON & MRS. BRENDA



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April 3, 2022



# *Follow by Participating*

## *Philippians 1:3-11*

Focal Verse:

“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

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Philippians 1:6

## Introduce

Looking at the world around us, we see many unfinished projects—started with insight, innovation, and good intention, but abandoned for many different reasons.

It doesn't matter how wealthy, educated, or technologically advanced a country may be; we find this same propensity to begin a project and leave it unfinished in every culture. Several years ago, I watched a documentary on abandoned infrastructure projects around the world. It featured an unfinished freeway in Cape Town, South Africa. Twin overpasses rise



over the city streets and lead to nowhere, having no connections whatsoever. These overpasses have stood in this unfinished state since work halted on the project in 1977 due to budgetary issues at the time!

We don't have to travel all the way to South Africa to observe abandoned projects, however. We can look to the south of 820 and see one right across our own freeway! A few years ago, a national hotel chain erected a sign on a piece of property south of the newly completed TEXpress project. Work began almost immediately. Out of the empty lot which had been cleared and graded for construction, plumbing for bathrooms began to rise and the concrete poured for the foundation. Suddenly, work ceased, and the sign eventually disappeared being placed with one advertising the land for lease. Both the foundation and the plumbing have laid dormant ever since even with the construction of a new fire station next to the property.

Before we get all up in arms about other people's unfinished and unrealized projects, let's examine our own. Take a look around your home. We have them too! We have good intentions, but we often put something aside saying, "I'll get to it later." I have many such projects around my house, crying for attention and waiting to be done—whether a picture to be hung, a button to be sown, or a mountain of debris stuffed into the garage or thrown into a drawer waiting to be sorted and filed. Even more likely, we have bought something in the past that we thought we'd use regularly, but it sits abandoned in a closet, in the corner, or on a shelf. We may have used it some, but then

## Introduce

our use waned. As humans, we have the tendency to begin something, sometimes with much vigor and energy, and then stop, leaving it unfinished.

Fortunately, we don't serve a God who follows such a pattern. He doesn't start something and then leave it undone. He finishes what He set out to do! He constantly works with us to transform us into the men and women we ought to be. Therefore, Paul can write with confidence that "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it" ([Phil 1:6](#)). Although God initiates and completes the work in us, He still requires us to participate in it. God produces the growth according to His plan, but we must also put forth effort in our own spiritual development. Spiritual growth and maturity are not something that just happen to us. Rather, God works in and through us which requires that we follow Him by participating in the plan for growth that He began when He saved us through the blood of His Son.

Key  
Question

What are some of the things in your life that you've not finished or from which you may have become sidetracked?

## Philippians 1:3-6

### **PARTICIPATE IN THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL:**

After an initial greeting in the first two verses, Paul opens his letter to the church in Philippi with a warm prayer of thanksgiving to God on behalf of the people (v. 3). Because the Philippians have the right perspective which focuses on a mutual concern for the spread of **the gospel**, Paul can **thank God** with great **joy** each time he remembers them in **prayer** (v. 4). Consequently, an attitude of **joy** pervades this letter because the church has actively partnered with Paul to spread **the gospel** throughout the Roman Empire ([Phil 4:14-20](#)). Most of us probably have someone who comes to mind that has played a pivotal role in our spiritual development whether through evangelism, discipleship, mentorship, or partnership in ministry. When we look back at their influence on our walks, we too should praise God each time we think about them, remembering them with great **joy** for sending them to help us mature in our faith and partner with us in ministry.

### **In-Depth Information**



The noun **joy** or the verb **rejoice** occurs fourteen times in Philippians making it Paul's most joyous letter ([1:4](#), [1:18](#), [1:25](#), [2:2](#), [2:17](#), [2:18](#) [\[twice\]](#), [2:28](#), [2:29](#), [3:1](#), [4:1](#), [4:4](#) [\[twice\]](#) and [4:10](#)). Thus, it serves as a testament to the **joy** that we ought to exhibit because of the work that God has done and continues to do in and through us.

Who has partnered with you in your walk with Christ? In what ways are you partnering with others?

Question  
# 1

In verse 5, Paul notes the reason for his **joy**. He specifically thanks God for the Philippians' participation **in the gospel from the first day until now**. Here, he uses the Greek term *koinōnia* (pronounced *coin-oh-knee-a*) which some translations render as **fellowship**. We most often invest it with this meaning today. However, in modern English, the word "participation" best captures the idea of this Greek word contextually. In twenty-first-century thought, **fellowship** has become synonymous with social gatherings usually involving food, conversation, and games or activities considered fun and entertaining. But the word that Paul uses here has the connotation of partnering

## Instruct

or working together to achieve a common goal—in this case the spread of **the gospel**. As such, the Philippians take an active role in participating **in the gospel**.

Our society's current understanding and practice of receiving a formal education often unfairly encourages students to take a passive role in learning. The onus falls on the teacher to prepare, put forth tremendous effort, and passionately inspire students. In many cases, teachers are graded harshly while students are given a pass. As a result of this current system, we have misguided priorities and misplaced responsibilities. The spotlight shines on the role of the teacher rather than on the performance and responsibility of the student! Teachers receive the blame for poor student performance. Both teachers and students, however, are responsible for their role in this educational journey. A teacher must know the subject, communicate it clearly, and guide his or her students prudently. At the same time, students must also participate in mastering a subject by completing assignments, asking pertinent questions to supplement their knowledge, and applying new concepts. Learning isn't a one-sided affair! It stems from active participation by both parties. Both students and teachers share responsibility!

The same rings true in our relationship with the Lord. God made this relationship possible. He literally did the **work** on our behalf through Christ via the **gospel**. And He still works in us through that very same **gospel** to conform us to His image. Although He began that **good work**, we must consciously choose to follow Him and join in His **work** (v. 6). We must participate in it. Let's not follow our society's misguided understanding. Let us join God in His **work**. Although Paul doesn't qualify the exact nature of the Philippians' participation **in the gospel**, we can deduce three primary ways they participate in it based upon the context of this letter. First, Paul points out that they have participated **in the gospel** from the **first day**; thus, he refers to their initial salvation to which they responded by accepting the gift of grace that God offers through His Son's finished work on the cross ([Acts 16:11-40](#)). To participate in God's kingdom **work**, we must first have a relationship with Him.

In what ways do you participate in the work God has begun in your life?

Question  
# 2

Second, Paul describes how the Philippians continue to participate in their spiritual development which will culminate on **the day of Jesus Christ**—that is when He

returns. As they wait for His return, they are actively involved in spreading **the gospel** by serving and ministering in their local community. This becomes evident in verse 7 where Paul states that they too partake in **grace** through **the defense and confirmation of the gospel** while he sits incarcerated under house arrest in Rome (v. 7). Every one of us has been called by God to evangelize, but each of us has been given a different spiritual gift which helps us to achieve that goal ([Rom 12:4-8](#); [1 Cor 12:4-31](#)). We also have different experiences and face different situations in which we have the opportunity to share **the gospel** in distinctive ways. Therefore, like the Philippians, we need to be involved in the ministry wherever God leads, in whatever role He has placed us, and through whatever means with which He has equipped us, so that the church as a whole can grow and we can see people come into a relationship with Jesus Christ. In verse 7, Paul identifies the Philippians as **partakers of grace** because they share in his desire for **the defense and confirmation of the gospel**. While in chains, Paul must literally give a **defense** in a court of law for his role in spreading **the gospel**. His actions not only confirm that he poses no threat to the sovereignty of the Roman government, but they also indicate the radical transformation he has undergone through the suffering he now willingly endures for the sake of Christ. We are called to a similar **defense of the gospel**.

We must intellectually defend its truthfulness from the deceptive beliefs and practices of the world ([1 Tim 1:18-20](#)). Therefore, we must faithfully adhere to the doctrine the Bible teaches, defending against claims of historical inaccuracy and charges equating it with mythology as well as against a distortion of its message and a



misunderstanding of its context ([2 John 1:8-9](#)). In other words, we must interpret and apply Scripture truthfully and accurately according to the context in which God has related it in addition to the false charges often levied against it.

Like Paul, our **defense** must be a two-pronged attack. In addition to defending the veracity of Scripture verbally, we must also confirm it through the way we live ([1 Peter 3:15](#))! Others ought to see a change in the way that we walk ([3 John 1:3](#)). There ought to be palpable life-change to which we can point that demonstrates the power of

## Instruct

**the gospel** to save. We can give a brilliant intellectual **defense of the gospel**, but it becomes a moot point unless it's accompanied by tangible evidence that confirms its power. We can't have one without the other! We must both be able to defend **the gospel** verbally and intellectually, but we must also provide evidence of its power in the transformed way we now walk. Thus, to confirm **the gospel** means that we declare what God is currently doing in our lives and then by subsequently pointing to the evidence that serves as **confirmation of His work!** Such a **defense and confirmation of the gospel** can be offered by anyone unless he or she is not truly practicing what the Lord has said.

How do you participate in the defense and confirmation of the gospel?

Question  
# 3

Third, the Philippians participate in Paul's ministry through both the encouragement they offer and the financial support they provide. One of the primary reasons that Paul writes this letter is to thank them for the tangible support of his ministry. In fact, he thanks them on two separate occasions for their support. First, they dispatched Epaphroditus to Rome to minister to his need while imprisoned ([2:25](#))—whether through mutual encouragement or via financial support we are not told at this point in the letter. Later, however, Paul relates how the Philippian church graciously and sacrificially provided finances for his work in Thessalonica ([4:10-20](#)) as well as in a love offering for the famine-stricken Jerusalem church ([2 Cor 8:1-5](#)). They partnered with Paul on behalf of the work of the Lord.

We must realize that our participation in **the gospel** comes not from our own strength and resources, but through God Himself. In verse 6, Paul acknowledges that God makes this participation **in the gospel** possible because He is the one who has begun the **good work** and He will also see it to completion. God is the one who both saves us and equips us to do the work to which He has called us. As a result, our confidence is not in ourselves, but rather it is in the Lord. If God has called us to a task, He will equip us supernaturally with everything with which will need to **complete** it. All He requires from us is complete surrender to His will and obedience in following Him wherever He leads. We must use what God has given us for His glory; the key is that *we* must use it—we must apply it!

At some point in our lives, someone has probably given us potholders, oven mitts, or

dishtowels—whether as a house-warming gift or a Christmas present. Indeed, they are practical and valuable gifts which serve a specific purpose. Generally, however, we do one of three things with them. We may fold them neatly and tuck them into a drawer where they never see the light of day. Or we may hang them in our kitchens as decorations, replacing them as the seasons change, but never using them for their intended purpose. Unfortunately, the last thing that many do with these gifts is to use them daily in the way for which they were designed!



All too often, we approach the gifts God has given us with this same mentality. God didn't begin working in us so we could just sit on our hands and do nothing. He saved us for a purpose. He called us to join Him—to participate—in His work. He didn't give us these gifts so we could bear them decoratively as a title after completing a spiritual gift inventory assessment. Rather, God has given us these gifts and begun working in us so that He might use us for His glory! If God is indeed at work in us, it should compel us to find our place of service where we can use our gifts for His glory. We won't make excuses. Instead, we will surrender to Him and follow His leadership, joining Him in the work He is currently doing! We will seek to serve Him daily as He works within us.

Which of these three approaches described in the illustration of the potholders describe your relationship to the Lord? Why?

Question  
# 4

## ***Philippians 1:7-8***

### ***PARTICIPATE IN GOD'S GRACE:***

In order to have an effective ministry in our local congregation, we need to perceive our service as a gift of **grace** rather than a laborious and cumbersome task. When Paul thinks of the Philippians, he regards them as **partakers**, along with himself, of God's **grace**. Certainly, the Philippians have experienced God's **grace** in salvation, but like Paul they have also experienced God's **grace** in their ministry ([Eph 3:1-7](#)). Too often,

## Instruct

however, we regard ministry as a second job that infringes upon the little free time that we have after our secular jobs and our responsibilities at home. We simply want to rest, relax, and recreate rather than minister to others in our spare time. We want to fit God into our schedules rather than adapt our schedules to follow His plan.

Consequently, many see attending church as their only spiritual obligation. Even then, most attend on Sunday, go home after a couple of hours, and feel they have checked it off their spiritual to-do list. They never truly get involved! In essence, they have taken the precedent Jesus established in [Mark 10:45](#) and reversed it: they come to be served rather than to serve. They may even try to make this self-centered desire sound spiritual and palatable by saying that they “come to be fed.” While being fed is of great importance and Jesus commanded Peter to equip the sheep in such a manner ([John 21:17](#)), being fed provides the foundation for us to grow in our walk and strengthen ourselves to serve the Lord. Being fed isn’t the end goal. On the contrary, it is means to the goal—growing and serving.

How does the feeding we receive through the church prepare us for service? Specifically, how does it prepare you?

Question  
# 5

Although ministry requires hard work, discipline, and sacrifice, we should view it as a gift of **grace** no matter what the circumstances or outcome may be. For even while Paul was **in chains**, that is in prison, as a result of his **defense and confirmation of the gospel**, he refuses to view the cost of ministry too high, but rather he gladly serves

**“FOR THIS REASON I, PAUL, THE PRISONER OF CHRIST JESUS FOR YOU GENTILES, IF INDEED YOU HAVE HEARD OF THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS GIVEN TO ME FOR YOU,”**

**EPHESIANS 3:1-2**

the Lord to the best of his ability. When we focus on the task, we can inevitably grow weary as the weight of the world presses upon us, causing us to give up easily. We may even become discouraged if we perceive a lack of results based on the world’s definition of success. If we focus on God’s grace, however, we will find joy and contentment for we will see

Him working within us regardless of the circumstances. We will recognize that our strength comes from Him rather than our own power and ability. For this reason, we can join with Paul in saying, “My [God’s] grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” ([2 Cor 12:9](#)).

What is the danger on focusing on the task rather than on the Lord?

Question  
# 6

## ***Philippians 1:9-11***

### ***PARTICIPATE BY GROWING:***

Next, Paul intercedes for the Philippians by praying for their spiritual growth in three key areas. First, he desires that they grow in their **love** toward both God and others ([Matt 26:36-40](#)) as expressed through maturity in their **knowledge** and **discernment**. The word translated **knowledge** means insight gained through personal experience in a close relationship rather than intellectual insight which we would call “book learning.” Therefore, it recalls our participation in the gospel through our continued growth after our initial salvation.

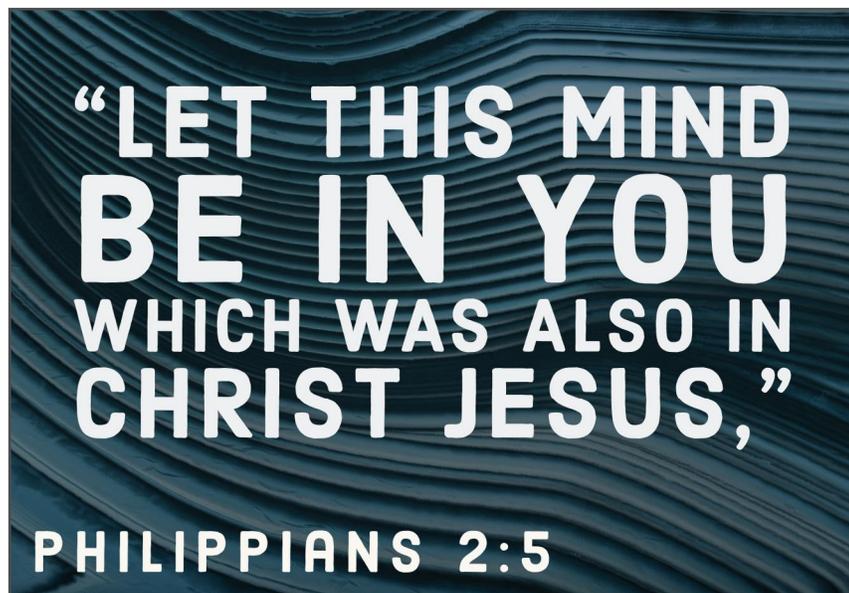
In order to grow in experiential **knowledge**, we need to know God intimately which comes through actively reading His Word, praying, and serving Him each day ([Phil 3:10](#)). When we grow in **knowledge**, we will also grow in **discernment** which means that we are able to differentiate between that which is morally right or wrong and act befittingly of our testimony in Christ—once again this results from knowing God’s Word and heeding the Holy Spirit’s guidance in our lives, thereby affecting the way that we conduct ourselves ([Phil 1:27; 3:20-21](#)).

In what ways does the knowledge you have about the Lord help you to be discerning?

Question  
# 7

We get to know others by spending time with them, not just reading about them on the Internet. Can we really say that we know someone about whom we have only read a profile or do we know someone with whom we have spent significant time in person? We can glean some **knowledge** by reading about a person, but we can much more by being with them. We learn by conversing with them, watching, them, and interacting with them. Marriage, and even close friendships, serve as a pattern for this

kind of intimate **knowledge**. Through personal interaction, we know other's habits, we can learn to anticipate how they will respond to certain situations, and we can become familiar with their idiosyncrasies. The same principle applies with the Lord. We get that intimate **knowledge** by spending significant time with Him. We can see His character, know what He expects, and we can discern how He will respond to different situations. But this requires an investment of time! We must spend time with Him to know Him. Second, the result of the Philippians' growing in **love** leads Paul to pray that they may **approve the things that are excellent**; thus, they will have the right perspective or thinking based upon the principles that God has revealed through His Word ([Phil 2:5; 3:15; 4:8-9](#)). The word translated **approve** literally means to test or discern as genuine



and directly connects with the idea of discernment from verse 9—thus, the Philippians must guard their minds and think about things which are holy and righteous rather than fill them with carnal knowledge and secular views. In order to have the right perspective, we need to look at people and events as Christ sees them—that is to have His mind or attitude. Our

opinions and preferences take a back seat to God's will so that we have a perspective centered on love, grace, and forgiveness and we work in unity toward glorifying God with our lives and service.

Third, Paul prays that the Philippians may grow by being **sincere without offense** which he further qualifies as **being filled with the fruits of righteousness**. In other words, he urges the church to live with integrity by exercising holiness in their actions and attitudes which produce a good testimony that honors Christ. In verse 10b, the phrase that they **may be sincere and without offense** literally means that they may be pure and blameless (see [Phil 2:15](#)). Consequently, Paul implores us to avoid sin and follow God's commands by the way that we live with honesty and moral uprightness. We are not to produce rotten fruit by selfish, sinful actions as defined by God's Word, but rather we should produce good fruit which imitates our Savior ([Gal 5:19-26](#)).

## In-Depth Information



The Bible has much to say about how we conduct ourselves. God has established boundaries by which we should live not to take away our fun, but rather to protect us and give us an even more abundant life ([John 10:10](#)). In the Old Testament, God bids His people “to be holy” for He Himself is “holy” ([Lev 19:2](#)) which Paul and Peter repeat in the New Testament when they bid us to be “holy and blameless” ([Eph 1:4](#); [Col 1:22](#); [2 Peter 3:14](#)). Paul even goes so far as to say that we ought to avoid even the appearance of evil in our lives ([1 Thess 5:22](#)) because God has called us to imitate Him in His love and holiness ([Eph 5:1-2](#)).

## Inspire

In North Texas, we are very familiar with work in progress. We see work in progress everywhere we look on our roadways. In fact, some portion of 35W has been undergoing, and is still undergoing, construction for decades! Although it seems interminably slow, we can still see progress. Similarly, God has begun a work in us by saving us. As we remain in this world, He is continually working on, in, and through us to accomplish His purpose. Although the work will not be completed until He calls us home through death or His return, we ought to see progress in our lives. If we don't see progress, we must stop and assess why. If we do, we must continue to allow Him to work in us, partnering with Him by participating in the gospel so that He can use us in any way He sees fit to accomplish His plan.

## ***Incorporate***

What are God's responsibilities in our maturation? What are our responsibilities? How would you evaluate your participation in fulfilling your responsibilities to grow in Christ?

Why should you view opportunities to serve as God's grace? How would viewing ministry and service as acts of grace change the way that we serve?

How well do you know the Lord? What assists you most in knowing Him more intimately? What did you learn about Him this week?

## ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*April 10, 2022 (Palm Sunday)*



# *Follow Him who Paid the Price*

## *Matthew 27:11-56*

Focal Verse:

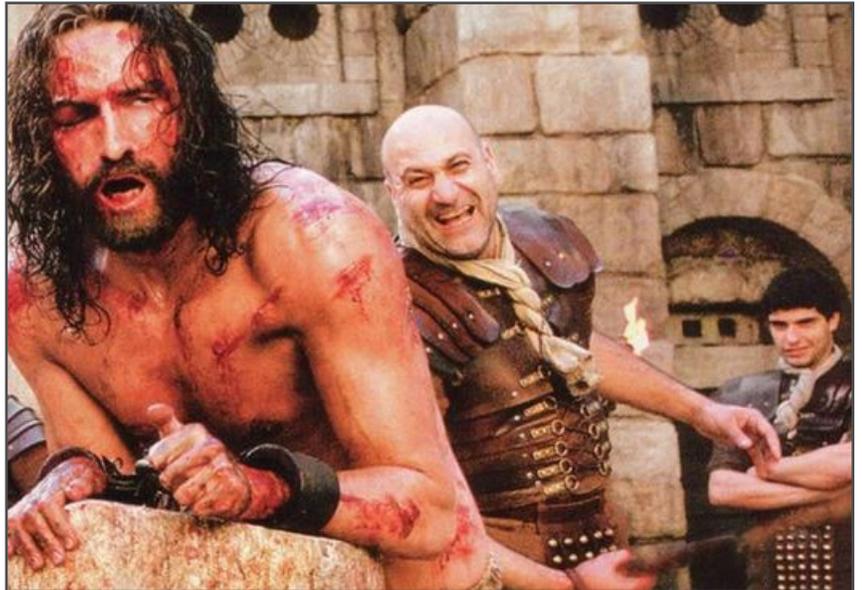
Then they crucified Him, and divided His garments, casting lots, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: "They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."

Matthew 27:35

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## Introduce

Over the years since the advent of movies and television, producers, directors, and actors have attempted to capture the agony and brutality of Jesus' death on the cross. But no one film or dramatic presentation can do justice to what our Savior actually experienced or capture what He endured for our sakes. Perhaps, the last best attempt to portray the crucifixion came from Mel Gibson who produced *The Passion of the Christ*. Because of the graphic depiction of the violence and bloodshed, even considered intense by our



own modern movie standards, the film earned an R-rating. As horrific, violent, and gory as *The Passion of the Christ* proved even for modern audiences, it does not even begin to relate the actual suffering our Savior experienced! Because of its violence, some of us may have not even been able to watch this film. Yet, our Savior lived it. He willingly submitted to it for you and me!

None of us can truly fathom how Jesus suffered prior to being nailed to the cross and as He hung there at Golgotha. Some of us may have stepped on a nail or shard of glass, cutting our foot. As much as that hurt and as much blood that poured from our bodies, this pales in comparison to having lacerations covering our entire body and stakes driven through our ankles and wrists. None of us can empathize with Jesus because we have never experienced the pain of dying slowly on a cross after being brutalized in sham trials in a phony court of law. So brutal is the act of crucifixion that our word "excruciating" comes from the Greek word "to crucify." Even if we have experienced "excruciating" pain or have been the victim of a miscarriage of justice, it's not the same as Jesus—God who became flesh and lived as a sinless Man to die for us!

I don't want to risk sounding morbid or macabre, but we must realize and remember the tremendous price Jesus paid to offer us eternal life. The Bible paints a vivid picture of the torture, cruelty, and brutality Jesus underwent. In many ways, however, we have become desensitized to the death of God in the flesh on the cross. The words on the pages of Scripture offer a glimpse into Jesus' suffering, but our modern minds have

## Introduce

nothing with which to compare it. Although we see violence on television through the news, fictionalized in movies, and portrayed in video games, it does not equate to being crucified! Many states, for example, have stopped capital punishment altogether or barred forms considered cruel and unusual. If a state allows the death penalty, it is performed primarily by lethal injection. Most states no longer allow hangings or electrocutions—although Utah does permit executions by firing squad. In the modern era, even during the use of the guillotine, crucifixion was banned because of its inhumanity!

Even so, none of these forms of execution can even begin to resemble the barbaric brutality that was the cross. Moreover, unlike those sentenced to death row, even if by mistake, Jesus was perfect and never once sinned! He was executed as a completely innocent Man. The cross has become a popular symbol that we probably see every day. Some wear it on their necks as jewelry while others may have clothing with it prominently displayed, but relatively few times do we stop and think about what the cross truly entails. As a piece of jewelry, it is a smooth, shiny piece of precious metal. Many people wear it because it looks nice or it matches their ensemble. They put it on without giving a second thought as to what it means. The cross, however, is an instrument of torture, representing shame, sin, and death. It demonstrates the unconditional love of our Savior and should remind us of the tremendous price that He paid to set us free.

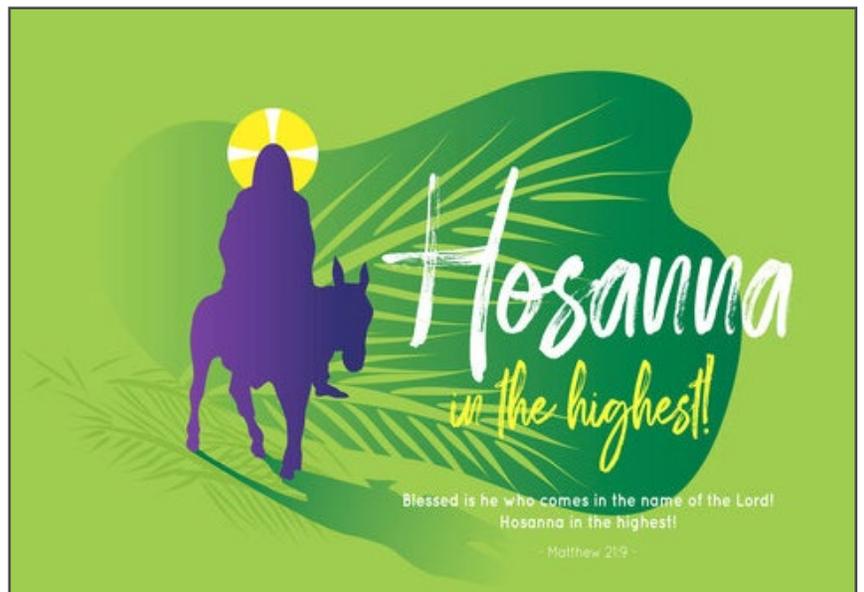
Key  
Question

How often do you stop and think about the tremendous price Jesus paid? How does it affect how you live?

### Matthew 27:11-26

#### ***THE INNOCENCE OF A RIGHTEOUS SERVANT:***

This Sunday, which we now commonly refer to as Palm Sunday, marks the beginning of the last week of Jesus' earthly life as He triumphantly entered the city of Jerusalem. Before being wrongfully convicted and barbarically executed, Jesus was welcomed into the city with great fanfare. As the donkey upon which He rode cantered through its streets, people lined them cheering and performing symbolic acts of adoration by cutting down palm branches and laying them on the ground along with their cloaks as the procession passed ([Matt 21:6-8](#)). The public literally treated Him like royalty, particularly a victorious King who had liberated them and freed them from oppression. As they filled the streets, they shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest" ([Matt 21:9](#))! The transliterated word *hosanna* means "Yahweh saves" and is a cry for salvation. Consequently, interpreted in this manner, it means, "Save us Son of David! Praise be to the One who comes in the name of the Lord! Salvation comes from above [Him]!" Outwardly, the people recognized Jesus as the Savior based on what He could do for them physically—the only One who could help them during their time of need (see [John 6:26-27](#)). Inwardly, however, many were merely caught up in the moment and went along with the rest of the crowd just like a "flash mob" today. For, less than a week later, the crowd turned against Jesus and the shouts of salvation turned into violent cries to "crucify Him" ([Matt 27:22](#))! Despite this warm reception, not all were glad to see Jesus arrive in the city. Soon, He would further anger Jewish leaders by confronting their exploitation of the temple and driving away the money changers enriching themselves ([Matt 21:12-17](#)). Jesus would then spend much of the week embroiled in contentious debate with the Jewish leaders, constantly reminding them about why He had come in fulfillment of the



## Instruct

Father's plan before turning to chastise their unbelief ([Matt 21:23-23:39](#)). Eventually, these events enraged the leaders so much that they plotted to kill Him ([Matt 26:1-5](#)). In the meantime, Jesus continued teaching and preparing His followers for the events that would transpire, leading to His death. Not only would He remind them of His impending death and subsequent resurrection, but He also urged them to be ready to receive Him when He came again—this time to gather His people, judge the world, and conclude history ([Matt 24:1-25:46](#)).

When did you cry out "hosanna," save me, to Jesus? How have you kept that salvation / relationship at the forefront of all you do?

Question  
# 1

By Thursday night, Jesus would eat His last Passover meal with His disciples as they reclined together at the table in the upper room ([Matt 26:17-35](#)). Knowing what would soon take place since He had already sent Judas to betray Him, Jesus traveled with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane where He asked them to watch and spend time in prayer as He separated Himself to communicate with the Father in private ([Matt 26:36-46](#)). While Jesus prayed and His disciples slept, the leaders in Jerusalem assembled a posse to come physically arrest Him and transfer Him to the high priest's home for trial ([Matt 26:47-56](#)). That night, without legal grounds, in a trial illegally conducted at night, and without eyewitness testimony or due the process prescribed by Scripture, the Sanhedrin convicted Jesus on trumped up charges ([Matt 26:57-68](#)). To validate these charges and appear innocent of His death, the members of the Sanhedrin brought Jesus to Pilate under the guise of submitting to the Roman government who alone had the legal authority to execute Him ([Matt 27:1](#)). However, Pilate did not want to deal with this either, so he sent Jesus to Herod—the puppet king installed within the region to keep peace ([Luke 23:6-12](#)). Jesus was then transferred back and forth between Herod and Pilate because neither wanted to take responsibility for executing an innocent Man. Finally, the burden fell upon Pilate to speak in a position of authority based on behalf of the Roman government ([Matt 27:11-14](#)). Even then, Pilate was more concerned with keeping the peace in a volatile region than ensuring justice! The prefect admittedly found no fault in Jesus which he expresses to the consternation and disapproval of the crowd ([Luke 23:4](#)). In a complete miscarriage of justice, Pontius Pilate appeals to the will of the people rather than release an

innocent Man! Citing a tradition of granting clemency to one prisoner, Pilate offers the crowd a choice between the well-known criminal, Barabbas, and Jesus ([Matt 27:15-26](#)). In unison, the crowd calls for Barabbas' release! Although not totally vindicated in the ordeal—for Pilate had the power to intervene, but didn't—he responded by washing his hands of the matter to signify his innocence in condemning a sinless Man ([Matt 27:24](#))! In the end, Pilate sacrificed an innocent Man to appease a crowd and keep the peace. In a way, however, Jesus did bring peace through His death—not the momentary peace of placating an angry mob, but peace with God in a restored relationship with those who accept the cleansing power of His blood through repentance ([Rom 5:1](#)).

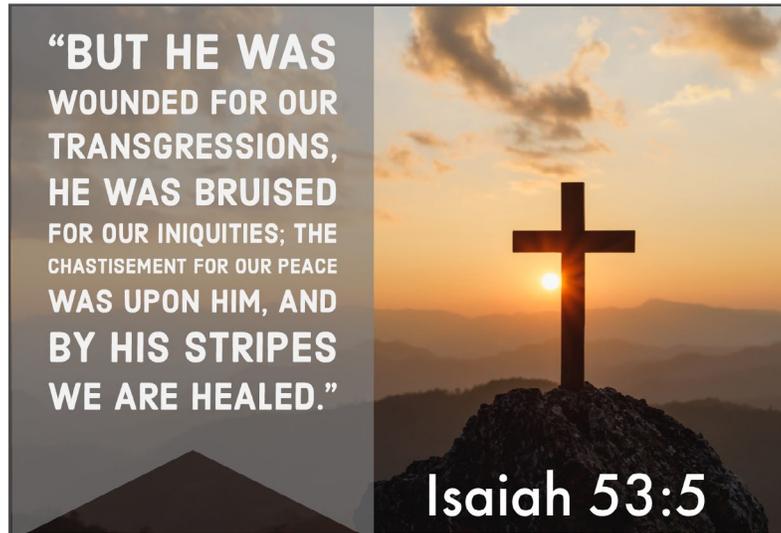


How have you sometimes found yourself getting caught up with the mentality of the crowd? How has the Lord taught you to keep your focus on Him?

Question  
# 2

After caving to the demands of a boisterous crowd, Pilate gave orders to release Barabbas and have Jesus flogged and executed by means of crucifixion ([Matt 27:26](#)). But this wasn't the first time that Jesus had to endure physical brutality. Previously, he had been slapped as He addressed the high priest ([John 18:22](#)), punched and asked to prophesy who had hit Him ([Luke 22:64](#)), and spat upon ([Matt 26:67](#)). Now, Jesus must endure an even more vicious assault deemed worthy of only the most-vile offenders. Isaiah foreshadows this inhumanity our Savior would face when he reveals, "His visage was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men" ([Isa 52:14](#)). As bad as the crucifixion would be, the scourging would rival it, if not surpass it, in pain! This was no ordinary whipping or paddling. Jesus' hands would have been securely fashioned to a post in the courtyard where he would have been forced to sit on His knees as burly, physically-well-conditioned soldiers pummeled his back with a whip. These whips consisted of leather strands interwoven with hard, sharp objects, like bones and shards of pottery. With each stroke, the whips would grip into Jesus' flesh—leaving not just welts and lacerations, but ripping the skin from his body! Many people did not survive these beatings which Jesus endured. But none were like

His inflicted upon a sinless, perfect Man undeserving of any violence against Him. First-century accounts regularly describe how people who were beaten in this way would



have so much flesh and muscle torn from their bodies that it would expose their internal organs. People bearing this punishment would not only die from extreme blood loss, but often because their ribs became exposed and their organs fell from their bodies. With all this torture and pain, we can easily understand why Simon of Cyrene was conscripted to carry Jesus’

cross to the place of crucifixion when He grew too weak to carry it ([Matt 27:32](#)).

Although very graphic and explicit, this is what our Lord went through to pay the penalty for your sin and my sin. He endured it all for our sakes! This may have been difficult for you to have read. It was difficult for me to write, knowing this is not some fictional movie or video game with senseless, grotesque violence. But the God who fashioned us in His image sent His Son to bear for us this punishment that we ourselves rightfully deserve! It brought tears to my eyes penning these words as I think about how much love it required for Him to suffer these things so that we might have a restored relationship with Him and how He has graciously made me worthy to be called His child through that blood.

Even though we may not want to think about this type of violent beating because we have become desensitized to gratuitous violence on television, we must remember exactly what Jesus faced. We must think about what He bore for us because we owe Him our very lives. Had it not been for Jesus’ sacrifice, we would have no hope. We would be hopelessly dead in our sins and trespasses. But, because of what He did, we can have hope and life in Him no matter what circumstances we face in life and no matter what we may have done. Glory be to God our Savior and His Son Jesus Christ!

How have some become desensitized to the violence Jesus endured? What can happen when we forget what Jesus truly endured for our sakes?

Question  
# 3

**THE IGNOMINY OF SIN:**

As much physical pain and torture that Jesus endured, He also experienced shame (ignominy) as people mocked Him and hurled epithets at Him, adding to the emotional torture of a loving God who came to save His creation which has now utterly rejected Him. The God of creation who so desperately wants a relationship with each one of us has now been sentenced to die abandoned and alone. At this point, all His disciples had already fled or watched the proceedings from a distance. Only at the cross do we see John at least close enough for Jesus to give instruction about Mary, His mother ([John 19:25-27](#)).

Before being escorted to the place of crucifixion, however, Matthew notes that a whole garrison of soldiers gathered to inflict more physical and mental anguish upon Jesus (Matt 27:27-30). The term used here in verse 27 refers to a Roman Cohort which means that approximately 600 soldiers

were mocking and beating Jesus. Then, these soldiers took Jesus' own clothes off and placed a purple robe upon Him—purple was considered a sign of royalty and aristocracy because of the expensive cost in producing the dye. They had no idea, however, that Jesus was indeed truly the King of glory who had given



up all His privileges in heaven to come to earth to save a wayward humanity. Jesus relinquished His divine throne and His heavenly raiment only now to have the soldiers He created to mock Him derisively as King.

Continuing their contempt, they placed a crown of thorns upon His head. The spikes on these thorns probably would have been an inch to an inch-and-a-half long, making deep cuts in His skin and bruising His forehead as it was forcefully shoved in place. Then, they placed a staff in Jesus' right hand to further mimic Him as a defunct and powerless King. The soldiers bowed before Him and mocked Him by retorting, "Hail, King of the Jews." Although the soldiers unknowingly mocked the actual King, it foreshadows [Philippians 2:11](#) when one day every knee will bow on earth and in

## Instruct

heaven, confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. One day everyone will truly acknowledge who Jesus is and what He did for them—even though they have rejected Him now.

When people show contempt for Jesus, how do / should you respond?

Question  
# 4

After dressing Jesus as a King, the soldiers physically began assaulting Him yet once again. First, they began to spit upon Him as a sign of disdain for a “King” who was helpless and weak in their eyes. Little did they know that He willingly laid down His life as a ransom for many ([Mark 10:45](#); [John 10:18](#)). Then, as they mocked Him, they took the reed that He held in His hand and started beating Him with it. Although the Bible does not specify how many of the approximate 600 soldiers struck Jesus with the reed, the plural signifies more than one and probably indicates many more than just two. Finally, the soldiers removed Jesus’ purple cloak as if He were a defrocked King who had succumbed to the might of the Roman Empire. After which, they put His own clothing back on Him and then led Him to the place where He would be crucified (Matt 27:31). As they led Jesus on the road to Golgotha, the Romans forced Him to carry His crossbeam, that is the part of the cross to which His hands would have been affixed, as a sign of submission to the empire (v. 32). However, because of the physical torture that Jesus had already endured, He collapsed along the way and was unable to continue carrying it, so the Romans enlisted a bystander named Simon who was from



*Possible Site of Jesus' Crucifixion*

Cyrene. We don't know much about Simon—whether he was or became a follower of Jesus. We only know that he hailed from modern-day Libya and the Romans asked him to carry the crossbeam. Upon arriving at the site of the crucifixion, referred to Golgotha or *Calvaria* in Latin, for its shape as a skull, the Romans would have laid the horizontal crossbeam on the vertical post and then began

to drive nails through Jesus’ feet and hands (v. 33). Jesus’ feet would have rested on a

platform or spike and they would have driven nails through the main nerve in the wrist, causing a tremendous amount of pain to shoot from His hands all the way to His spine. Once they attached Jesus to the cross, several soldiers would have hoisted it into place as a testament to onlookers for the penalty of sedition against Rome.

Crucifixions could take many days because death usually occurred by asphyxiation rather than blood loss. As the victim tired, his legs would slump on the platform under his feet which supported His body weight. Thus, he would not be able to fill his lungs to capacity because his diaphragm would constrict—eventually causing Him to suffocate. In Jesus' case, however, the injuries that He sustained from the trials were so severe that He died within a matter of hours because He became weakened so quickly that He could not push upright to breathe. For this reason, they did not break Jesus' legs to hasten His death like they did those of the other two ([John 19:31-32](#)).

As Jesus hung on the cross crying out from dehydration, the soldiers attempted to give Him a concoction of wine mixed with gall ([Matt 27:34](#)). Scholars have long debated as to what this drink actually was and what purpose it served. Some suggest that it was a sedative to help with the pain, but this is not logical because the whole purpose of crucifying an individual was to inflict as much pain as possible to deter others from committing similar offenses. Still, others surmise it would have been very bitter and caused Jesus to become even more thirsty; therefore, the soldiers used it as another way to mock our Lord. This latter view is supported the assertion found in [Luke 23:36](#)! In any case, however, Jesus put the drink to His lips, but did not partake of it ([Matt 27:34](#)).

Next, the soldiers dicker over the clothes which they had stripped from our Savior in fulfillment of a prophecy foretold in the Old Testament (v. 35). [Psalm 22:18](#) asserts, "They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots." Although we don't have time to go into all the Old Testament references which foretell of Jesus' crucifixion, we can make one general observation. The Old Testament as a whole points to Christ as the ultimate work of salvation for a sinful world. It would be remarkable if a person who claimed to be Messiah even fulfilled a couple of these references from the Old Testament, but the fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies clearly reveals that Jesus is who He said He is: God in the flesh.

What brings undeserved shame and reproach upon Jesus today?

Question  
# 5

### Matthew 27:45-46

#### **THE INTERVENTION OF OUR SAVIOR:**

Somewhere around three o'clock, Jesus died on behalf of the whole world for all our sins. Matthew notes that from the sixth to the ninth hour, that is from noon to three o'clock, the earth was covered in darkness (v. 45). This unusual darkness at the brightest part of the day highlights the miraculous death which was about to occur. Jesus was not an insurrectionist against Rome or even a malefactor and criminal, but rather He was the perfect Son



of God who came to die for the entire world so that we might have eternal life in Him when we ask for forgiveness and repent of our sins!

As darkness covered the earth, Jesus cried out in a loud voice in Aramaic: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" (v. 46). Bearing the sin of the world, Jesus, who knew no sin Himself, became sin on our behalf, feeling isolated and separated from the Father, cried out in tremendous grief ([2 Cor 5:21](#)). However, never at any point as Jesus hung on the cross did He cease to be God, but Jesus as God in the flesh died for our sins, thereby giving us hope of eternal life when we trust in Him. The God who created us came to redeem us by dying on our behalf! What tremendous love this shows! Those observing the crucifixion, however, misunderstood what Jesus was saying, so they continued mocking Him; they believed that He was crying for Elijah to come and rescue Him (v. 49). The people expected a military and political Messiah—but this concept was completely foreign to Jesus' first coming and His ministry here on earth. They erroneously thought that Elijah would return to signal the arrival of the Messiah, but unbeknownst to them John the Baptist had already heralded His arrival: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" ([John 1:29](#)).

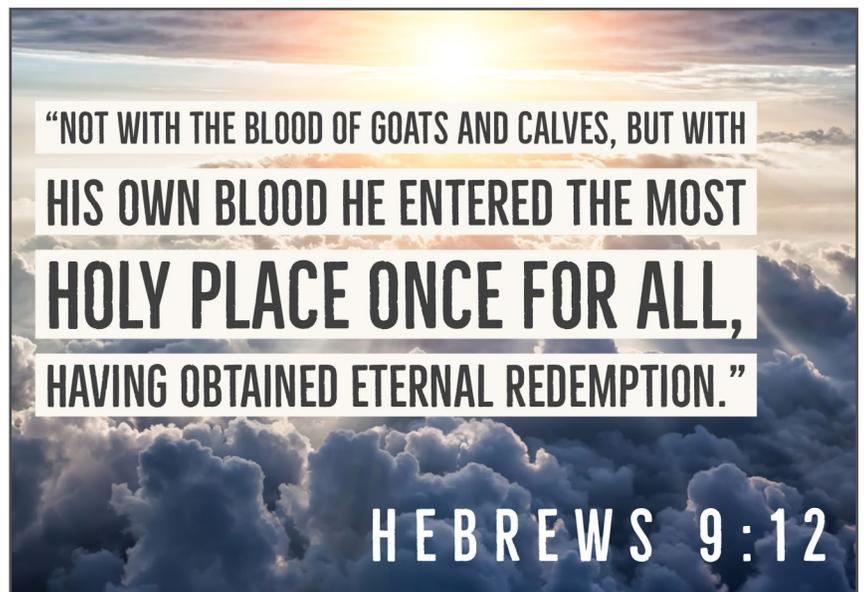
They were looking for something physical and temporary, but Jesus delivered that which is spiritual and eternal. The people couldn't fathom that this victory could come

from death. They failed to comprehend why His death was necessary ([Heb 9:22](#)); therefore, they taunted Jesus to save Himself by coming down from the cross ([Matt 27:40](#)). For this reason, the people derided Him that He purported to be able to save others, but He could not save Himself.

How do people erroneously view the Messiah today? In what do they trust? How can we help them to see the Messiah has already come?

Question  
# 6

After His cry of forsakenness and abandonment captured also in [Psalm 22:1](#), Jesus cried out once again and then died (v. 50). As He died, all creation shook and miraculous events began to occur, for the Creator had given His life for the creation who rebelled against Him (vv. 51-54). At that moment, a violent earthquake shook the region and the veil in the temple was torn from the top to the bottom. Most likely this was the veil that separated the outer sanctuary from the Holy of Holies in which the Ark of the Covenant once resided and the high priest entered only one time a year making a sacrifice for his sin and the sin of the people. The Holy of Holies symbolized God's presence among His people. And now, through Jesus, mankind has access directly to God. Through the magnanimous gift of His Son, we are able to enter the Holy of Holies with confidence and stand before the Lord no longer separated by our sin. Jesus has provided the only way to have a relationship with God by overcoming the separation that our sin had caused.



We need the intervention of a Savior because we have no way of rectifying our sin problem on our own. We can't do enough good works. We can't participate in mere religious ritual, for not just any sacrifice would work. Animal sacrifices are imperfect and ineffective because they only remind us of our sin year after year. They cannot remove our sin nor can they change our hearts as Hebrews makes clear. Only one sacrifice can! Only one sacrifice takes away sin, removing the penalty and transforming the heart. That sacrifice was not God's plan B, but it was His very plan even before the

## ***Instruct***

foundation of the world. Scripture best summarizes that plan: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

What impact has Jesus’ intervention as the once-and-for-all-sacrifice for sin had upon your life?

Question  
# 7

## ***Inspire***

This Easter season of 2022 may we spend time pondering the tremendous price Jesus paid for us to have eternal life. As we think upon all the pain He willingly endured and the blood He shed for us, may it impact our lives in a profound way. As we go forth from this day may we keep the cross at the forefront of our minds, remembering Jesus’ once-and-for-all sacrifice through which He graciously saves anyone who will receive Him. May His death motivate us to conform ourselves to His image. Just as the Apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:10, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” Above all, may we share the hope of life we have in Christ with the hopeless world around us, knowing Jesus’ ability to save through His death, transform us through repentance, and conform us to His image through the resurrection.

## ***Incorporate***

What detail(s) of Jesus' trials or crucifixion have the most impact upon your life? How do you use those details to share the gospel?

Why is it important to keep the cross at the forefront of our mind? How does Jesus call us to respond to the cross?

Given the importance of the crucifixion and resurrection, list the names of individuals with whom you intend to share the gospel this week and invite to church.

*April 17, 2022 (Easter Sunday)*



# *Follow Prudently*

## *1 Corinthians 15:13-14*

Focal Verse:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty.

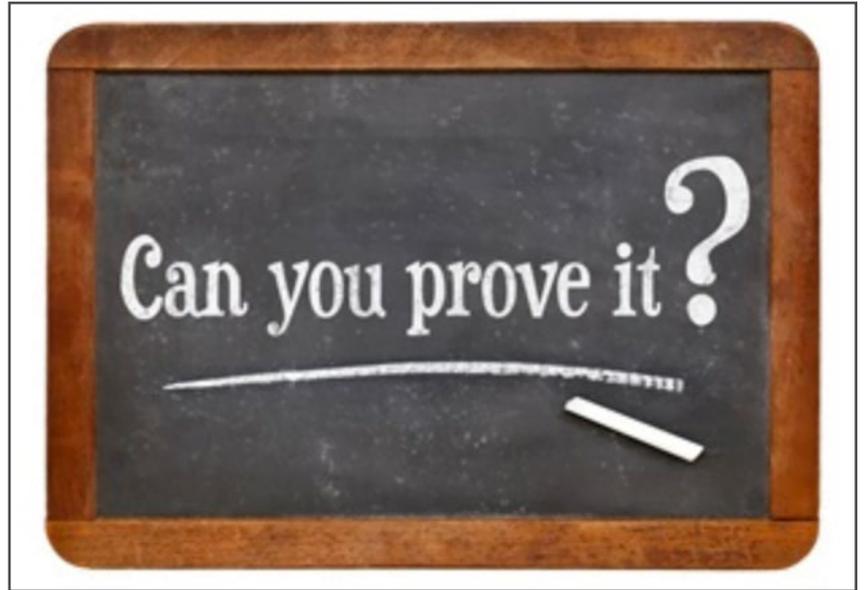
1 Corinthians 15:13-14

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## Introduce

We live in a world which sees itself as sophisticated and enlightened because it prides itself on its ability to reason scientifically. Indeed, we often hear people spouting facts and figures, clamoring for others to look at the evidence or follow the science in order to persuade them to adopt their view. Yet, they only point to the evidence and follow the science so long as it supports the view they espouse.

The moment the evidence conflicts with their belief they try to suppress it, they alter it or redefine the parameters, or they ignore it altogether. Our society may claim to think critically and logically, but it sometimes doesn't. It often dismisses things it doesn't understand rather than



spending time investigating and assessing them. Ironically, the call to investigate and assess through observation is the bedrock principle of the scientific method and the supposed "crux" of our society's intellect! But our society sometimes doesn't apply this principle it purports to believe!

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of those areas which people frequently fail to consider rationally. Rather than look at the evidence, in this case an empty tomb of a historical Person known to have physically died, they simply dismiss it uncritically as myth. Yet, when one looks at the actual evidence carefully recorded through eyewitness testimony, the resurrection is most assuredly the best explanation for the empty tomb! In fact, Lee Strobel discovered this very thing in his own life's journey. Having graduated from the University of Missouri (Bachelor of Journalism) and Yale Law School (Master of Studies in Law), he served as editor for *The Chicago Tribune's* legal section in addition to working for other newspapers during his career in journalism. A self-proclaimed skeptic and atheist at the time, Strobel began investigating the historicity of Jesus after his wife became a follower of Christ. The "About" section on his website reads: "After probing the evidence for Jesus for nearly two years, Lee became a Christian in 1981."\*

Since that time, he has penned several books, including the indispensable work titled

## Introduce

*The Case for Christ* which would prove a valuable read for us all as a defense of the historicity and viability of our faith from a former atheist's perspective. If people would only take the time to investigate, listening to the historical information and data we have in Scripture, they would come to this same conclusion as Mr. Strobel. They would realize how reasonable it is to believe in Christ as the hope of our eternal salvation. Certainly, however, reason must be paired with faith and response to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Our belief in Christ is not a mere intellectual assent, but a restored relationship through repentance and forgiveness in response to the blood He shed. God has given us all the evidence in Scripture we need to make a wise and informed decision to trust in His Son and find life! Have you looked at the evidence? Have you shared that evidence with others? But most importantly, have you responded to that evidence, not just by cognitively "knowing" it, but by calling on Him for salvation and beginning a relationship through His Son?

Key  
Question

How has God used you to defend the veracity or truthfulness of the resurrection to others? What did you say? What evidence did you cite?

## In Reference



For more information, see [leestroble.com](http://leestroble.com).

## THE STOLEN BODY THEORY

Scripture itself contains the earliest attempt to explain the empty tomb and dismiss the claims of Jesus' resurrection by His opponents. [Matthew 27:62-66](#) records how Jewish leaders sought a detachment of guards from Pilate to secure the tomb since they recalled Jesus' teaching that He would rise from the grave three days after His death. Subsequently, in an effort to cover up what had truly happened once the guards came to deliver their eyewitness report of the events that night, the Jewish leaders bribed them to say that Jesus' disciples came stealthily while they slept and stole His body ([Matt 28:11-15](#)). When we carefully examine the eyewitness testimony from the first century, we can establish the reasonableness of the biblical account of the resurrection over the failed attempt of the Jewish leaders to deceive the public.

The character and mood of the disciples subvert the notion that they orchestrated such an

audacious plan to defy the empire by stealing the corpse of the One whom they had just crucified! Scripture describes them as fearful—not bold and cunning. Prior to the crucifixion, the disciples scattered in fear as the group seized and arrested Jesus in Gethsemane ([Mark 14:50](#)). Peter, just as Jesus predicted, was so afraid of what might happen to him that he denied even knowing Christ three times ([Luke 22:54-62](#)). After the crucifixion and burial, all the disciples remained hidden. They locked themselves in the upper room for fear of the Jews ([John 20:19-29](#)). This hardly sounds like a group that would risk everything to perpetuate a hoax by stealing Jesus' body.

**JOHN 20:19**

*Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them,*

*“Peace be with you.”*

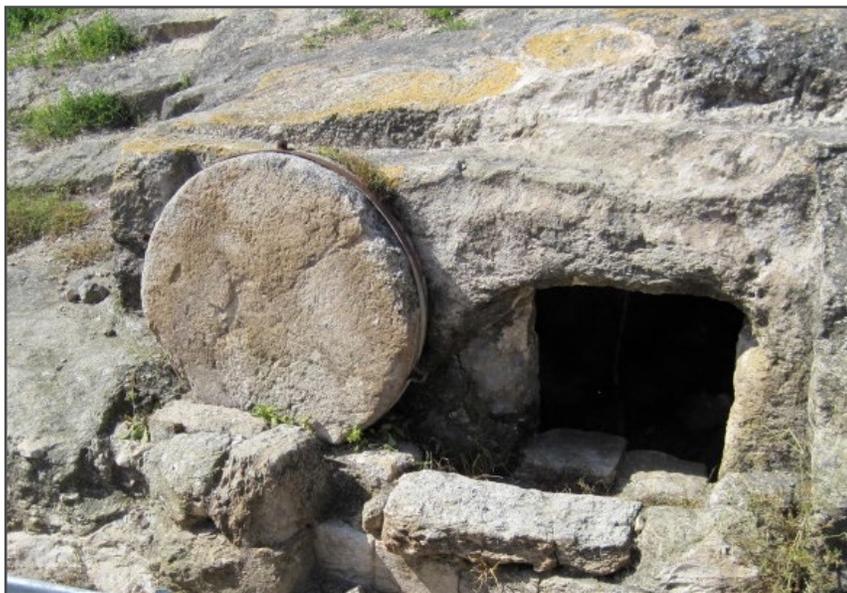
How do you see the disciples change as a result of the resurrection? What do these changes indicate about the validity or truthfulness of their testimony?

Question  
# 1

Whereas the Jewish leaders recalled and reflected on Jesus' teaching that He would rise

from the dead, ironically the disciples, His closest followers, did not. In their state of mourning, we see them depressed and confused. Although they had heard Jesus teach them many times concerning His death and resurrection, they did not truly understand nor did they expect it. The bodily resurrection of Jesus still caught them unaware and unprepared. Early that Sunday morning, the women who came to finish anointing Jesus' body for burial discovered the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Until the risen Jesus revealed Himself to her, Mary Magdalene thought that the gardener had moved Jesus' body to a different location ([John 20:11-17](#)). In astonishment, Peter and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves upon hearing the women's testimony of what had transpired ([John 20:2-8](#)). Still others, like Thomas, defiantly disbelieved until he could physically see the wounds and feel the scars even though many other disciples had seen the resurrected Jesus and given him their personal testimony ([John 20:24-25](#)). A group of people who didn't remember Jesus' teaching and were confused at the events could not have organized such an elaborate scheme to steal His body! The most damning evidence against this view is that no one received any punishment for the theft. Stealing the body, especially one crucified and guarded by Rome, would have been seditious—a crime worthy of death itself. First, the soldiers would have been punished for being derelict in their duties and falling asleep on the job, allowing a band of rebels to humiliate Rome. For a Roman soldier to fall asleep on guard was inexcusable and punishable by death! Yet, we have no historical record of any soldier receiving even a reprimand for their role in this event.

Moreover, had the guard fallen asleep surely the commotion of the thieves coming



and moving the stone that sealed the entrance would have roused them. After all, they were highly trained professionals positioned against a band of ordinary citizens: fishermen, tax collectors, and the like. Even the testimony of which they were bribed to give does not make sense if they slept through the robbery. How could they know what had happened to the body

and who had stolen it if they were asleep? They cannot adamantly declare it was the disciples because they have no evidence to support their testimony if their eyes were closed in slumber!

Second, had the disciples truly stolen Jesus' body it would have motivated Rome to respond swiftly. This wouldn't have been a petty crime, but a defiant act against the empire itself. And Rome would have wanted to quell such defiance quickly by issuing harsh penalties to prevent further unrest in an already unstable region. Furthermore, it would have been easy for Rome to get a confession out of at least one of them had they actually done this. Rarely would anyone die for something he knows to be a lie. But each of the disciples saw the events first-hand and told the truth even if it ultimately meant their death! They knew the events to be true and the resurrection to have really happened.

## **THE HALLUCINATION THEORY**

Over the years, many have tried to explain the empty tomb in various ways in order to discount the resurrection and dismiss the claims of Christ. We will start with the weakest attempt first. Some have proposed that Jesus did not physically rise from the dead and that the disciples merely hallucinated when He "appeared" to them after His death. This would be tantamount to someone so grieved that they see life-like visions of their loved one or have vivid dreams about them. We won't spend much time analyzing this particular view, although much can be said, because one crucial fact destroys the entire premise! If Jesus' physical appearances after His death had been only a hallucination, His body would have still been enshrined in the tomb!

The claims by His disciples could have easily been dispelled and dismissed by going to the tomb and producing the body to show the public proof that He had indeed died and had not risen. The Jewish leaders would have wanted to debunk the disciples and stop this burgeoning movement in its infancy. But they couldn't! They couldn't produce a body because the tomb was empty. The fact that they couldn't invalidates this entire proposal



## Instruct

and serves to corroborate that the disciples interacted physically with Jesus who had bodily risen from the grave! Although His body could do things we cannot do such as unconventionally appear in the middle of a locked room, He could still be touched ([John 20:24-27](#)), eat ([Luke 24:42-43](#)), and do other physical things we do on a daily basis, proving that the disciples did not hallucinate but that they saw Jesus bodily resurrected from the grave.

## THE WRONG TOMB THEORY

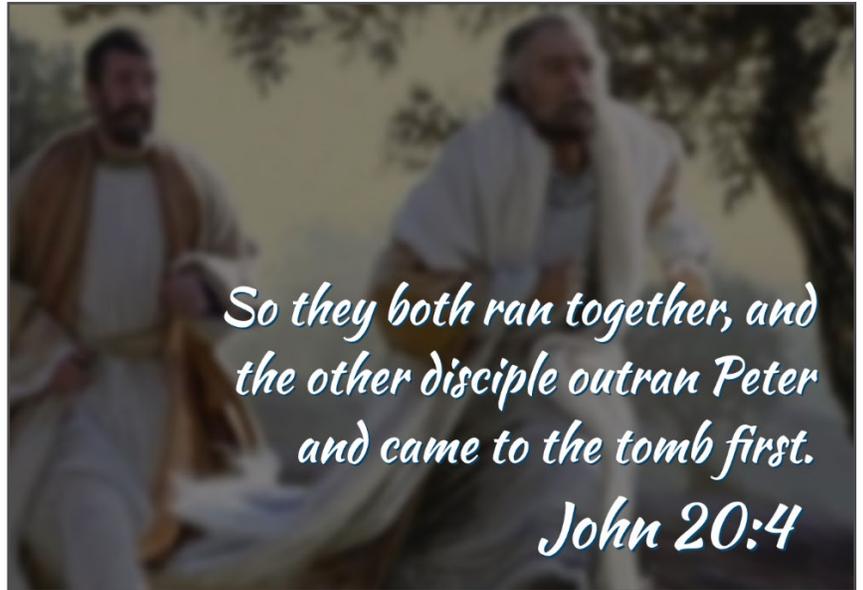
Because the tomb was indeed empty and no physical body could be produced, those who support the hallucination of His disciples must combine it with another theory even to make it seem somewhat plausible. Therefore, some posit that everyone in Jerusalem went to the wrong tomb! Like the other proposals we've discussed so far, this one is just as preposterous when we consider the evidence. Perhaps, it would be believable if one or two people went to the wrong tomb in their distress, but not everyone! Upon Jesus' death, two men, Joseph and Nicodemus, sought permission from Pilate to bury Him ([John 19:38-42](#)). From Scripture, we know the tomb belonged to Joseph from Arimathea as what we would describe as a "family plot" today. Although it had not yet been used ([John 19:41](#)), Joseph would have assuredly known the location to the family tomb he had purchased. What person wouldn't know the details of the property he had bought? Anyone could have asked him and he could have guided them there!

In addition, Nicodemus, a Pharisee whom we know from [John 3](#), was with Joseph during the burial process. He, along with the other Pharisees, would have known the location of the tomb. The Jewish leaders would have ensured they had accurate information because they wanted it guarded as we learned in the very first section, for fear the disciples may steal the body! Therefore, the Jewish leaders, as well as the soldiers stationed there, could have verified the location of the tomb. They could have then pointed anyone in the right direction to dispel any notion that Jesus had risen from the dead. But they couldn't! They couldn't because they went to a known tomb in the right location and found it empty!

Why is Jesus' bodily resurrection important for us as believers?

Question  
# 2

We may pass over subtle clues in the text that affirm people in the first century knew and went to the right tomb. Suppose, for a moment, the women did go to the wrong tomb that morning in their state of grief. For those of us who have experienced such grief, this could happen when we aren't thinking clearly. (But I don't believe it did.) The women came back and reported to Peter and John who then went to check it out for themselves. From the account of the crucifixion, we know that John was physically there throughout



the whole crucifixion process while Peter had fled after his denials. After learning the news of the empty tomb, both men went, but John ran ahead of Peter (John 20:4). Why is this an important detail? Both would have been equally as intrigued and excited. One could, however, say that the younger (John) naturally outran the older (Peter). But I would propose a different reason. John knew the location of the tomb because he had already been there! John led the way. He didn't go to the wrong tomb. He ran with confidence to the place where he knew the body had once lain!

### **THE APPARENT DEATH: THEORY**

One of the most popular theories used to explain the empty tomb is the apparent death or swoon theory. It suggests that Jesus did not die upon the cross, but in His weakened state that He fainted and was erroneously declared dead by the Romans. In the cool, damp air of the tomb, He resuscitated or revived. Then, He returned to convince His disciples that He had actually risen while ultimately they nursed Him back to health. It takes much more faith to believe this explanation than in the resurrection itself when we look at the evidence!

As we learned in detail last week, Jesus underwent excruciating torture and physical trauma before and during His crucifixion that hastened His death. From the beatings, the crown of thorns placed on His brow, and particularly the scourging or whipping, Jesus lost a significant amount of blood, leaving Him too weak to carry His cross to the place of crucifixion. People often died during this type of scourging He received let alone all the other physical injuries He endured.

## Instruct

In addition, the crucifixion was supervised by trained individuals who would have been



*But one of the  
soldiers pierced His  
side with a spear, and  
immediately blood  
and water came out.  
John 19:34*

well acquainted with death. They would not have been irresponsible in removing Him prematurely from the cross even with a very holy day (Passover) to the Jews drawing close. Therefore, we see the Romans breaking the legs of the two convicts with Jesus to expedite their death. When they came to Jesus, however, they already found Him dead, so they

did not break His legs in fulfillment of the prophecy from the Old Testament ([John 19:31-33, 36](#)). To certify His death, one of the soldiers took a spear and thrust it into Jesus' side ([John 19:34](#)).

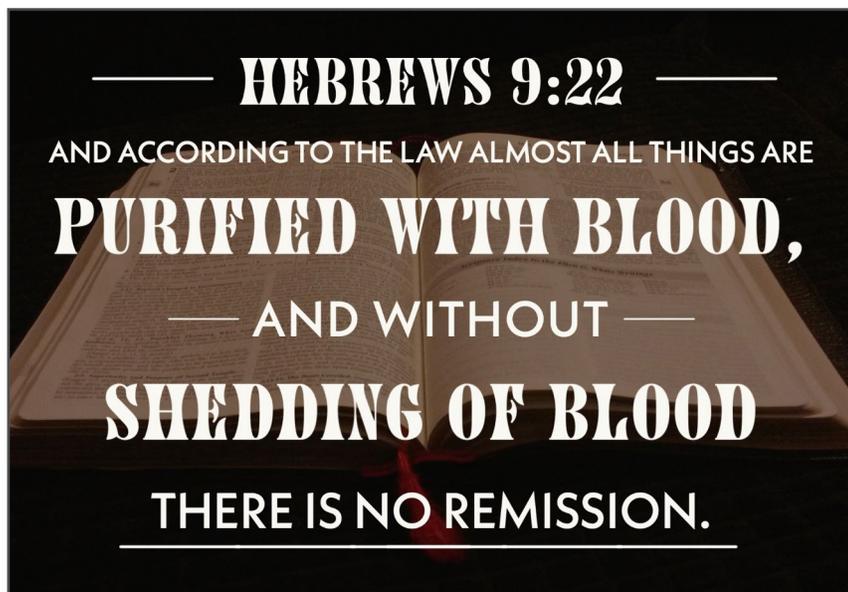
This one act alone proves Jesus died and did not merely faint. Scripture notes that both blood and water poured from our Savior's side with the piercing of the spear. Medically, without going into all the complex details, this indicates that the spear punctured Jesus' heart where fluid would have built up from His body shutting down and not being able to breathe. For those familiar with congestive heart failure, we know such liquid must be drained from the body frequently. No one could have survived a spear through the heart and likely portions of at least a lung, especially in Jesus' condition!

If Jesus could have somehow survived all these beatings and the spear propelled into His side, the recovery in the tomb would have been even more miraculous! Scripture tells us that His body was laid on a shelf therein and embalmed with approximately 100 pounds of spices ([John 19:38](#)). With lacerations covering His body, this would have sent Him into further shock—not revived Him. Think about how peroxide and other sterilization treatments hurt when we pour them on our wounds! But imagine how that would feel had our bodies been covered from head to toe in cuts and bruises! Even then, had Jesus recovered He would have needed to muscle enough strength to roll the boulder from the entrance. Yet, He didn't have the strength prior to being nailed to the cross to carry the crossbeam. He would then have to walk on wounded

feet in His frail condition past soldiers guarding the tomb. Technically, a prisoner of Rome sentenced to death by crucifixion, the soldiers wouldn't have let this occur! At the very least, they would have been responsible for detaining Him or would have simply overpowered Him, finished the job which the crucifixion failed to do, and return Him to the tomb! It doesn't make logical sense that Jesus could do the physical things required to extricate Himself from the tomb had He not risen.

Suppose He did escape from the tomb unnoticed and managed to move around the city to various locations making contact with His disciples in His weakened condition, He would need to convince them that He had indeed risen from the dead and not merely revived! Although Jesus bore the scars in His hands, feet, and side, His wounds had completely healed in a matter of three days. The last time His disciples saw Him He was battered and bruised. Now, they failed to recognize Him—having completely healed—until He revealed His identity through the things of which He verbally reminded them.

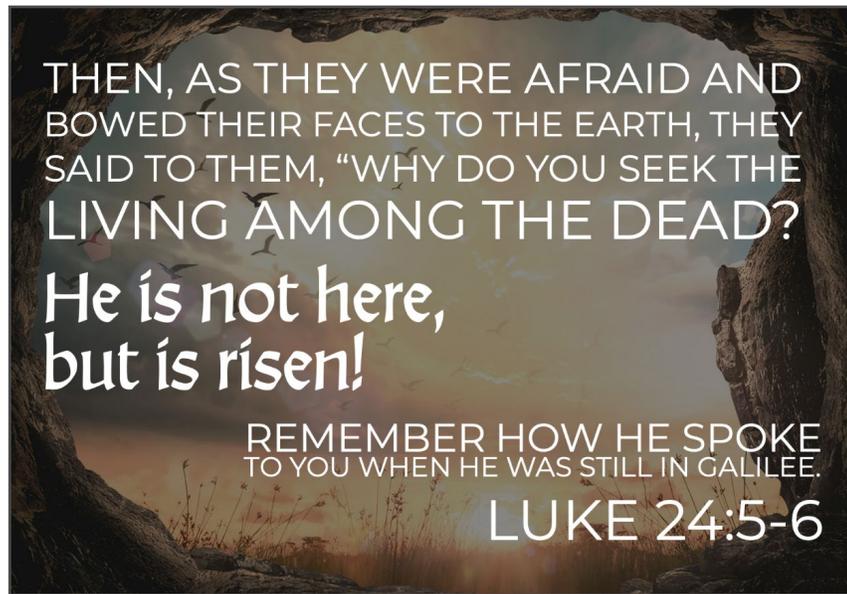
If Jesus would have burst forth from the tomb swollen, caked in dried blood, covered in bruises, and bearing the marks of whips and the prints of nails, is it plausible that the disciples would have believed He had truly risen from the dead in that condition? Would you? Most likely, we would think the same thing that this theory proposes. He didn't die, but only resuscitated. Based on historical knowledge of the act of crucifixion and eyewitness accounts pertaining specifically to Jesus, we can know He assuredly died, vacated the tomb through the resurrection, and appeared physically to His disciples over a period of forty days. The resurrection, as a result, validates His claims and proves Him to be who He says: the Son of God in the flesh who came to bear and remove the sins of the world.



### **1 CORINTHIANS 15:13-14**

When we carefully and critically examine the evidence of the crucifixion and empty tomb, the bodily resurrection of Christ Jesus makes the most logical sense even though

it seems to defy natural law. The crucifixion—a single event with two parts so to



speaks—is the center of our faith and the crux of our salvation. For without it, we would be hopelessly lost. Through this single event, we have life. And this life only comes through Christ ([John 14:6](#)). If Christ had not died and was not raised from the dead we would have no hope. As Hebrews tells us, we would have no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood

([Heb 9:22](#)). We would have no guarantee of eternal life, for we would “still be in [our] sins” ([1 Cor 15:14](#)).

Praise be to God He sent a Savior to restore us into relationship with Him. What we could not do ourselves, He came to do on our behalf. So, when we accept His gracious sacrifice by confessing and repenting of our sins, we can attain life in Him. His resurrection serves as a guarantee of our own when we have a relationship with Him! It gives us hope. It gives us peace! It provides us with victory no matter what we may face here on earth! Although people may attempt to dismiss the resurrection as fantasy and fiction, we can ascertain the truth when we look at the evidence. If Jesus is who He says, then we must follow the plan for eternal life which He specifies. Have you followed that plan in your own life and do you help others to know that plan through the gospel? As we celebrate the victory we have over sin and death through the resurrection, may it have an impact on our lives so much that it influences everything we do and everything we say! May that hope be the center of our lives through Christ Jesus.

Although we live in a society that claims to be enlightened and rational, we see insanity everywhere we look. Our job is not to “convince” people of the validity of the resurrection and the message of Christ. Rather, it is to be faithful to present the truth, allowing God to convict and convince. Even then, God gives people a free choice to turn down His offer of salvation in His Son. And sadly many do. They rejected Jesus to His face. Yet, Jesus never wavered from speaking the truth in love and pointing people to the Father. We must do the same as His followers. No matter the response of the individual, we must speak the truth in love, pointing others to the Father through Jesus Christ His Son. We can offer a rational and reasonable explanation for the empty tomb, but it is up to the individual to choose what he or she does with that evidence. What have you chosen to do with it? How has it changed your life?

## *Incorporate*

How has the resurrection changed you? How has it impacted your life?

How does the resurrection give you hope? How does knowing that Jesus rose from the grave help you to deal with difficult situations and circumstances in life?

How have you shared the hope of the resurrection (i.e., the gospel) this week with others?

# ***Journal: Document God's Work***

*April 24, 2022*



# *Follow by Proclaiming*

## *Philippians 1:12-26*

Focal Verse:

“What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.”

Philippians 1:18

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## Introduce

Have you ever heard the phrase: “the message has gotten lost?” Today, it could quite literally refer to a document delivered via the mail despite all our twenty-first century technological advances. Depending upon the context, it could refer to a text message or e-mail that has gotten lost in a slew of things that fill our inboxes. Although it could mean these things, it is mainly used when a key component of a message is hard to comprehend; thus, other non-crucial points overshadow and obscure the message that a speaker or presenter wishes the audience to grasp.

Sometimes a message translated from one language into another faces these same challenges. Many years ago, while working with our international service, I had the privilege of going to a wedding ceremony of a couple from Burundi who regularly attended church. At the reception, the best man rose and began giving a speech—much like we do in our own culture. Realizing some of us in attendance could not understand, another gentleman began translating what was being said into English. And much to my chagrin he translated it quite literally. In the original language according to cultural customs



and norms from East Africa, the speech would have made sense. But something became horrifically lost in translation; the message had gotten lost and had become overshadowed by the metaphor.

The best man, through the translator, began comparing the bride to a cow. He described the different parts of the cow and how they symbolized the new life of the bride. But, in English, it didn't make sense and the appropriate emphases were not given. Moreover, the way the metaphor was related could have been offensive to people, causing them to tune out the rest of the message. The translation had caused people to become fixated on the metaphor of the bride as a cow rather than the symbolic meaning. Personally, I asked another person who knew both languages fluently to help me understand what the best man was trying to convey. But to the audience in general, the damage had already been done through the literal translation.

## Introduce

When we present the gospel, we must exercise great caution that the message doesn't get lost or overshadowed. We must pay particular attention to our actions and attitudes, so that they don't distract others from the truth of the message. When we have the wrong motives or our actions don't reflect Christ-like living, they can easily detract from the message of the gospel. In our passage this week, we will discover how Paul had to deal with those who preached with the wrong motives. They preached from envy and strife, wishing to cause trouble for him instead of preaching with love and righteousness. Yet, Paul could still rejoice because the gospel was not overshadowed, but its message still preached. Nevertheless, it doesn't excuse us from preaching responsibly with a clear and consistent message. As we follow Christ by proclaiming the gospel, may we do so with correct motives, the right attitude, and through our righteous actions so that the gospel might go forth even more powerfully as it did in Philippi and Thessalonica ([1 Thess 1:2-10](#)).

Key  
Question

In what ways have you seen the message of the gospel being hindered today by the way people preach it or live?

### Philippians 1:12-14

#### **PROCLAIM THE WORD CONFIDENTLY:**

Paul begins this section by explaining to the Philippians that the **things which happened** to him have **actually** served to advance the spread of the **gospel** rather than hinder it (v. 12). The events to which Paul refers occurred in Jerusalem when a fracas erupted in the temple instigated by the Jewish leaders who claimed that he had abandoned the Law and defiled the temple by bringing Gentiles onto the premises ([Acts 21:27-40](#)). To avoid being beaten and killed by the angry mob and the temple guard, he appealed to his Roman citizenship and his right to receive a fair trial ([Acts 22:23-28](#)).

However, when he appeared before the Roman governor Felix and later Festus, he still didn't receive a fair trial so he appealed to the Roman emperor to hear his case—which would be like having our Supreme Court adjudicate a case today ([Acts 25:9-12](#)). After suffering a shipwreck on the way to Rome, Paul then spent nearly two years in the capital city under house arrest awaiting trial ([Acts 27:27-44](#)). To most, this looks like it would have fettered and stopped the spread of the gospel, but in reality it served to accelerate it.

#### **In-Depth Information**



*Throughout his ministry, the Apostle Paul perhaps suffered more than anyone. In [2 Cor 11:23b-27](#), he lists all his many troubles. He has faced beatings—both with rods and whips—being stoned and left for dead, imprisonments, shipwrecks, harassment from both the Jews and Gentiles, and physical exhaustion through arduous journeys, lack of food and clothing, and stressful work. Despite all these problems, however, Paul never let mis-fortune and persecution dissuade him from his God-given purpose of spreading the gospel.*

How have you seen God work through difficult circumstances to spread the gospel?

Question  
# 1

Through Paul's personal testimony, we see that he shares the gospel in all circumstances; regardless of the situation, whether imprisoned or free, whether fearing for his life or in living relative peace, or whether facing severe opposition or open-arms,

## Instruct

Paul proclaimed the Word confidently and without hesitation. Most of us, if we were imprisoned unjustly for our ministry, would probably complain, concentrate on seeking “justice,” and some of us may even contemplate a way to retaliate against our accusers. Paul, on the other hand, used the opportunity to glorify God and proclaim the Word which **has become evident to the whole palace guard** (v. 13). Paul doesn’t mention this to brag about his unselfish work, but rather to illustrate how far and how quickly the gospel has spread—even his chains of imprisonment could not impede the spread of the gospel! As a result, his example has inspired other Christians to speak more boldly and **without fear** even though they may face the same kind of obstacles (v. 14).

### In-Depth Information



The **palace guard**, more formally known as the Praetorian Guard, was an elite unit of the Roman army that served and protected the emperor and the civilian government in the city of Rome.

Contrary to human logic, persecution and adversity often serve to propel the gospel forward, rather than hinder it, because it rids us of a spirit of apathy. In the face of contention and conflict with the world for standing on the Word of God, people must make a conscious choice not to shrink in fear, but to live righteously and proclaim the gospel boldly. Knowing the risks and the consequences of our choices, we must trust in the Lord and turn to Him for strength rather than cower in the corner afraid of the culture.

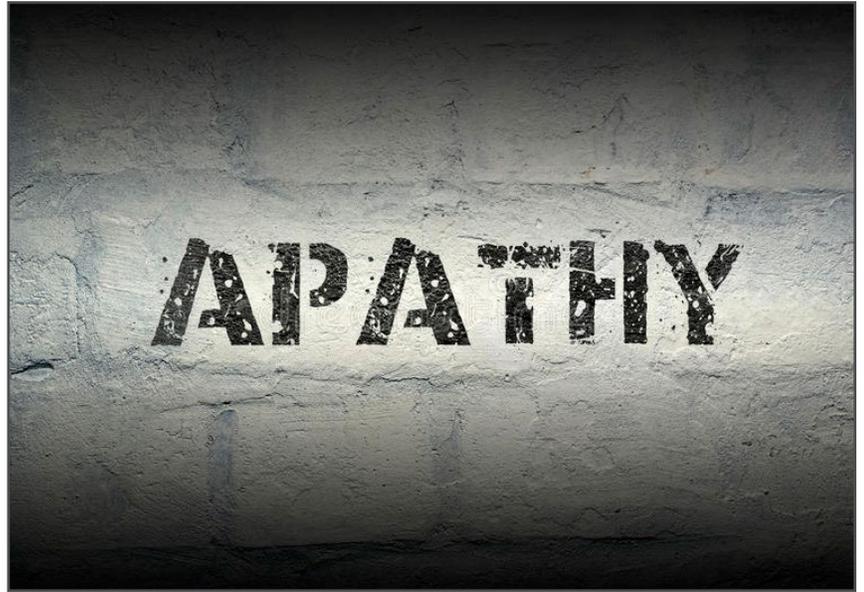
This doesn’t mean that we parade our faith arrogantly or intentionally present the gospel in an offensive manner. Further, the call to avoid apathy doesn’t mean that we insult others, call people names, or intentionally provoke verbal, or even physical fights, with others. Nor does it mean, as we will see in the next section, that we draw attention to ourselves pridefully through our own exploits. Quite oppositely, we will mimic Christ’s character, speaking the truth in love and resisting the cultural call to compromise.

What causes us to become apathetic? How do you see apathy in the church today?

Question  
# 2

The quickest way to “kill” the advance of the gospel is to become apathetic and complacent. Unfortunately, we see that spirit of apathy dominating in many churches

today. Apathy causes us to focus inwardly and seeks to maintain the status quo. We tend to become apathetic in life when we reach a stage where we have all our needs met and we must put forth very little on our own to meet them. We put life on cruise control and expect smooth sailing! Many in the church who know the truth and even personally practice it have become complacent, focusing inwardly, whereas those who have a distorted view of truth and even reality itself have become more vocal and emboldened to push their views on others!



We must both live and proclaim the gospel boldly every chance we get. We should never view the culture as too far gone for help or write them off as a lost cause. We should never become apathetic and say, "What's the use in proclaiming the gospel to a culture that has such a distorted view of reality?" Let's not fall into the trap of focusing inwardly and seeking comfort at the expense of compromise on the truth. Although the gospel certainly transforms us inwardly as individuals through the work of Christ, it transforms us inwardly so that we can become a conduit outwardly whereby the message of salvation and life in Christ flows through us to a lost and dying generation devoid of hope. Therefore, we must maintain the right view of how God wishes to incorporate us into this process. He wants to use us to disseminate His Word to the culture rather than sit back and let the culture "do its own thing."

How would you describe your focus in terms of the gospel?

Question  
# 3

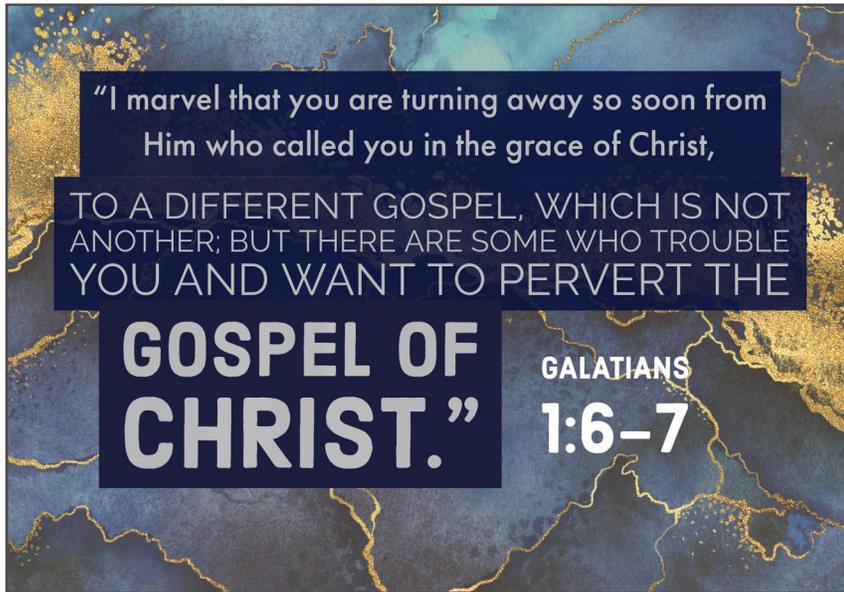
### ***Philippians 1:15-18a***

#### ***PROCLAIM THE WORD WITH CORRECT MOTIVES:***

We live in a society which exudes competitiveness and rivalry even amongst churches to see who can have the most in attendance and the biggest budgets rather than working in a spirit of cooperation to spread the gospel and advance the kingdom of God. In our modern society, however, we must qualify this observation. We can only

partner with like-minded churches who share the proper interpretation of Scripture and have the right understanding of the doctrine of sin and salvation. If “churches” distort the gospel, we must show them the truth and gently correct them. Paul does this when first-century churches take the wrong path; He doesn’t just let them believe whatever they want ([Gal 1:6-9](#)).

We also see this same spirit of competition amongst individuals who jockey for positions of prestige and power in a very similar fashion to the corporate world. They



may have the right message, but they assuredly have the wrong motives in what they preach. Paul too encounters people preaching the right message with the wrong motives. Because he does not correct any doctrinal errors in Philippians, we can assume that he finds no problem with the message. Consequently, in these verses Paul condemns their

motives rather than their message because the opponents in Philippi have a problem of the heart rather than a problem with preaching a false gospel—right message, but wrong motives! Thus, he faces this same spirit of competition in his own day when people preach Christ out of **envy and strife** and **selfish ambition** (v. 15).

What are the essential doctrines on which there can be no compromise? How should we respond to those who differ in their interpretation of these doctrines?

Question  
# 4

In verse 16, Paul grieves that these people proclaim the Word in order **to add affliction to his chains**. In other words, they have turned the spread of the gospel into a competition, seeking to make more disciples than Paul, to plant more churches than he, and to win more converts. In their own right, these are noble tasks, but the prideful spirit of competition detracts from the true purpose of glorifying the Lord. It can overshadow the message just as we saw in the introduction! By putting Paul down and mocking his imprisonment, they attempt to elevate themselves in the eyes

of their followers. People who seek to compete do so without **sincerity** and because of their **selfish ambitions** they take pride in titles of honor and positions of prestige rather than honoring God in their ministries. They have an air of superiority about them because they believe they know more than others, their spiritual gifts are more indispensable to the kingdom than others, and they are more righteous and holy than others.

What motivates you to proclaim the Word?

Question  
# 5

Conversely, we ought to have a spirit of cooperation in sharing the gospel based on our **love** for Christ. God's **love** for us motivates His response toward us. It motivated His Son's sacrifice for us ([John 15:13](#); [Rom 5:8](#)), it motivates His discipline of us ([Heb 12:6](#)), and it motivates His physical care or provision for our needs ([Psalm 136:5](#)). Likewise, our **love** for God ought to motivate and compel us to act by proclaiming the Word. What greater **love** could we have for someone other than to warn them of the danger of a life apart from God? What greater **love** could we have for someone than to share the gospel with them so that they might know how to have eternal life? Often, we think that silence and avoiding arguments rather than speaking the truth about Christ demonstrates more **love** and tolerance, but in actuality it expresses the opposite because we fail to show them love by keeping the good news of eternal life in Christ to ourselves.

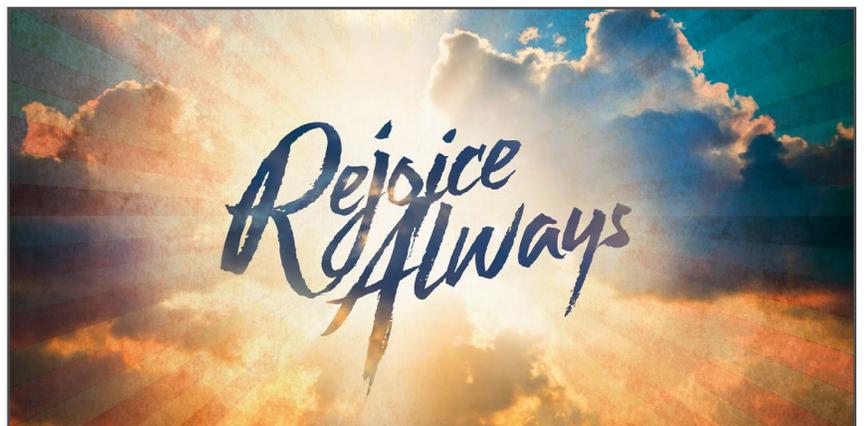
What is the danger of remaining silent about righteousness? What effects of remaining silent do we see today?

Question  
# 6

### **Philippians 1:18b-20**

#### **PROCLAIM THE WORD TO CELEBRATE CHRIST:**

Even though some people preach with the wrong motives in order to exalt themselves, the true focus of our proclamation should be the exaltation and praise of Jesus Christ. Instead of focusing on the motives of those who preach **envy and strife** according to a spirit of



## Instruct

competition, Paul expresses joy that the gospel is still preached. Twice in the latter half of verse 18 he breaks into expressions of joy: **In this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.** Regardless of the circumstances we face or through what trial we may be going in life, to see people hearing and responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ ought to bring us joy!

### In-Depth Information



*In the twenty-first century, the term **preach** has become primarily associated with a message that a pastor delivers on Sunday mornings to the church. In this way, most Christians have become complacent with sharing the gospel because they feel that this is the pastoral staff's duty to **preach**. However, the word that Paul uses here means to announce, proclaim, or declare with the broader sense of sharing the gospel in this context—something that both the pastoral staff and laity should do together. Every one of us who has a relationship with Jesus Christ has something to announce and declare to the world!*

In verses 19-20, Paul continues to note that whether he remains in prison, is granted his freedom, or he lives or dies, he will **magnify Christ**. However, in his current situation, he fully expects to be released from prison soon to continue his mission to spread the gospel to the Gentiles because he expresses confidence that his imprisonment and hearing with the emperor **will turn out for his deliverance** because of the Philippians' **prayers** and the **supply**—that is help from—the Holy Spirit. Because Paul is fulfilling the will of God through his ministry, he has **nothing** of which to be **ashamed** ([Rom 1:16](#)), and, in fact, he has the **boldness** even in the face of imprisonment and persecution to **magnify** the Lord through his **body**. To magnify Christ, Paul both lives righteously—that is he lives with integrity and obedience to the principles in God's Word—and he proclaims the Word of the Lord boldly in all situations regardless of the cost.

How have you exalted or magnified Christ in your life? How have you proclaimed His Word boldly?

Question  
# 7

## Philippians 1:21-26

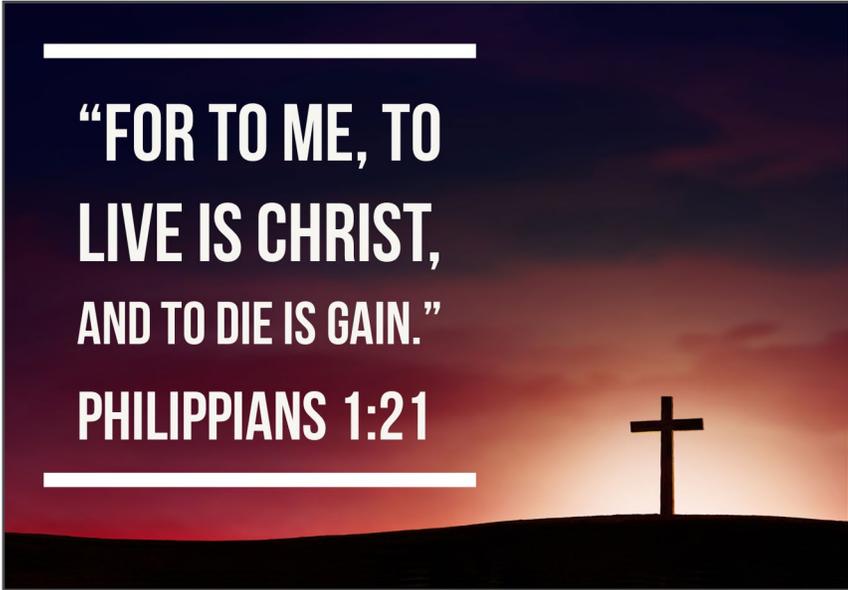
**PROCLAIM THE WORD TO CONTINUE DISCIPLESHIP:**

53 As he sat in prison, Paul contemplated the advantages of both **living** and **dying** (v.

21). **To live**, he surmises, means to honor Christ, but **to die** brings even more **gain** because he can spend eternity worshiping the Savior apart from the trials of this world. Paul is torn between the two options because he knows that dying and being with Christ is **far better**, but at the same time God has also called him to a mission to proclaim the Word and disciple others while here on earth (v. 23).

If he **lives**, Paul asserts, it will mean that he will bear **fruit** in his **labor** which is more profitable for the Philippians as well as the others whom he evangelizes and discipled (v. 22); therefore, even though Paul longs to spend eternity with Christ in heaven, he recognizes that God still has a task for him to complete here on earth—proclaiming the Word. Paul spells this out in verse 25 when he elucidates his **confidence** that he shall **remain** in the **flesh**—that is remaining alive in his physical body—in order to assist the Philippians in their **progress and joy of faith** (v. 25). In other words, Paul will continue mentoring and teaching the Philippians, helping them to grow in their faith as they continue to conform themselves to Christ.

When we have a relationship with Jesus, God leaves us here on the earth instead of calling us home for two reasons: 1) to share the gospel with others and 2) to disciple Christians who need to mature in their faith. As important as the initial proclamation of the gospel is, the discipleship of new and young believers is as equally important because they desperately need a solid foundation on which to build lest they become sidetracked in their own pursuit of maturing in Christ. Because we never stop learning or growing in our faith, even mature believers who have had a relationship with Christ for years benefit from discipleship in their lives! Therefore, we need to work one-on-one with each other to **progress** in the **faith** not just in biblical knowledge, but also in applying it in a practical and tangible way which honors God.



**“FOR TO ME, TO  
LIVE IS CHRIST,  
AND TO DIE IS GAIN.”  
PHILIPPIANS 1:21**

What is the task to which God has called you and His reason for leaving you here on earth?

Question  
# 8

In the introduction, we saw how easily a communication can go awry and obscure the intended meaning of a message. The folly of the messenger can become the focus of attention rather than the message itself! When it comes to the gospel, we never want this to happen! The focus shouldn't be on the messenger, but on the Message about the Savior. In the flesh, sometimes we can get caught up in emotion and the need to draw attention to ourselves, but we must remember that we can't save. No matter how dynamically we speak, how great of illustrations we use, or how electric our personality can seem, we cannot save! We are merely the vehicle through whom God has graciously chosen to deliver that message. So, when we follow Him by proclaiming the Word, may we preach with confidence, communicate with the right motives, and point others to His Son. May they see Christ rather than us, for He alone convicts and saves!

## ***Incorporate***

What external forces try to discourage you from sharing the gospel? What plan, like Paul had during his imprisonment, do you have to overcome these forces?

How do you exalt Christ in your life, even in the midst of difficult times? How do others see that praise and exaltation as a testimony to our Savior?

Who has discipled you? What did you learn? Who do you disciple?

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