

Stripped Away: You Win
Philippians 1:12-30
Small Group Discussion Guide

OPENING QUESTIONS (get everyone involved in discussion):

- What are some things you delight in? (There's no right answer; it doesn't have to be spiritual.)
- What does it mean to "delight" in something?

TRANSITION: We're doing a sermon series this fall where we're asking, "Who are we when life strips things away? When we boil away all the superfluous things that make up our lives, what remains that we can rely on?"

During this series, we're walking through Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul was the one who had first brought the good news of Jesus to people in Philippi, and they had developed a very affectionate relationship over the years. Now he's imprisoned in Rome, awaiting trial before Caesar, with his life hanging in the balance, and he's thinking of his dear friends in Philippi.

In the portion of the letter where we're looking today, Paul is looking to re-assure his friends that despite his imprisonment, he is thriving. He encourages them that they can thrive too, despite any circumstances.

READ PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18a

- Think about something difficult you've walked through recently—an illness, a loss, a difficult relationship, etc. To what degree were you able to thrive through that experience?
- Based on Paul's circumstances, what might the Philippians think his state of mind is?
- Paul is, surprisingly, thriving. In these verses, why does Paul say he rejoices?
- From last week, who would like to give us a 1-minute or less summary of the gospel?
- One way the gospel is advanced is Paul being chained to the Praetorian Guard, The Emperor's elite troops (like our President's Secret Service).
 - Can you imagine being chained to Paul's arm for four hours every day, the most passionate preacher who ever lived? What would that be like?
 - What does the passage say was Paul's effect on the Praetorian Guard? How must Paul have approached his hours with them, chained arm-to-arm, to have this effect?
 - **How can we view any situation, especially when we are suffering, by the lens of how it advances the good news of Jesus (i.e., "the gospel")?**
 - What is one situation in your present life where you could take this approach?
 - In what relationships do you find yourself, where you can consider it an opportunity to walk with them and love them for the sake of the gospel?
 - Looking back at the difficult experience you mentioned above, were there opportunities to advance the gospel in that season?
 - Pastor Josh stated that this approach will not help us thrive in any circumstance if we try to muscle it. Rather, we must **delight** in the gospel. What does it look like to delight in the gospel? Is this something that you've experienced?
 - Is the idea of delighting in the Gospel ("to live is Christ") new to you, a regular habit, or somewhere in between?

- There's another reason that Paul says he rejoices while he's locked up and facing trial.

READ PHILIPPIANS 1:18b-26

- How can Paul be delivered even if he never gets out of prison? (Vv. 19-20)
- Paul is discussing the hypothetical question of whether he would choose to be freed, or choose to have the emperor condemn him to death (knowing that the choice is out of his hands.) He summarizes in v21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
 - What does he mean, "To live is Christ?" How does Paul win if he goes on living in the body?
 - What does "to die is gain" mean?
 - As we heard on Sunday, Paul is insisting, "Whatever happens to me, whether I get set free or I get condemned to die, either way, I win!" How is this true if he dies?
- **Do you believe that you can thrive in any circumstances when you see that the ultimate outcome is a win for you?**
 - On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being high, how much do you fear death?
 - On a scale of 1-10, how much do you fear suffering and failure in life?
 - When you're controlled by fear, what will be some of your responses or actions?
 - How much has your reaction to fear cost you in your life?
 - What can lower these fears of death, suffering, and/or failure?
 - Let's consider a better way to cope with fear. *Are Jesus and his gospel your true delight?* Where have you placed your confidence?
 - Josh suggested two ways to test this:
 - What do you daydream about? What consumes a lot of your attention during your day? How can Jesus and his gospel begin to fill your thoughts?
 - Where do your thoughts go when you are looking for hope or encouragement?
 - Of the following activities, which has been most valuable for enabling you to delight in the gospel? Which could you add to your rhythm?
 - Weekly Sabbath – so work is not your delight or identity?
 - Giving generously – so money doesn't define you?
 - Daily prayer – to communicate with God and recognize your dependence on God?
 - Daily Bible reading – to receive spiritual truth and guidance from God?
 - Weekly worship in a community – to glorify God and to be encouraged by your fellow members of your Christian community?
 - Trying a short-term mission trip, where you give up some comforts and realize how precious the gospel is?
 - **If your greatest delight is in Jesus and his gospel, you can thrive when all else is stripped away.** What do you think is getting in the way of Jesus being your greatest delight?
 - Some people think that the gospel is just your entry point into the Christian faith. How can it become sweeter, and even more enriching, the farther you go in your journey?

PRAYER: Share with one another some of your current needs, and pray for one another.

- Among our prayer requests, let us pray to make Jesus our delight so, like Paul, we can thriving and be joyful in any circumstance, no matter how difficult.