

Daily Devotional, October 14, 2020 Setbacks or Opportunities?

12" Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ." Philippians 1:12-13 (NIV)

Some years ago, Laura and I were on our way to Orlando, Florida as one of our vacation destinations. While driving through Jacksonville. I took the wrong exit and, the next thing you know, we are on a highway traveling through the water to destinations I could not even locate on the map. We had no intention of visiting any of these places, stuck on this waterway, with no place to turn around for many miles. All it took was a wrong turn in an unfamiliar place in Jacksonville, some cheerful conversation, and a little bit of inattentiveness and we were led far off our pre-determined path.

Now, you have to understand, this trip came before there were GPS and iPhones that could show us which way to go. This little error took us far out of our way and far off even our printed map, and put us well behind our schedule. It was not a great way to continue our vacation as it was a set back to our schedule, as we had lost several hours.

Life is full of setbacks. Some are admittedly troubling, but small, like a wrong turn in Jacksonville. Yet some are rather large. So often we have plans and dreams that get interrupted. The Apostle Paul knew all too well about personal setbacks. Paul's goal was to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and start churches throughout the Mediterranean world. Paul continually came up against one setback after another. More than once, Paul had rocks thrown at him for his preaching about Christ and was often run out of towns and regions for disrupting their peace and security.

In the book of Philippians, we find Paul under arrest, locked in chains as he often found himself. How could he possibly achieve his goal now? Situations like this never seemed to deter him. Though he was subjected to punishment and incarceration in a Roman prison, his joyful spirit and determination to share the good news of God permitted his dream to be fulfilled even under such grim circumstances. Paul seemed to always see each obstacle as a new opportunity!

Now, once again locked away in prison, Paul had a new *captive* audience. Those who made up his new audience were prison guards, fellow prisoners, and those who would receive his many letters that he wrote as he was whiling away his many hours and days of punishment for advancing the Gospel. Paul remained fixated on his steadfast goal, and regardless the intensity of the numerous difficulties, Paul seemed forever able to succeed in bringing his goals to fruition. Due to his perseverance against the many roadblocks he faced, for centuries the church has been blessed for his inspired and tireless effort. The passionate, honest, and joyous expression of his thoughts in the book of Philippians has been inspiring people of faith for nearly 2,000 years.

You know, setbacks will happen. Our plans will get interrupted constantly. But that does not stop us from persevering and doing great things. Setbacks are nothing more than opportunities to do something that we were powerless to predict. When we arrived in Florida, we made the best of our time there. We ended up on some backroads that gave us an opportunity to see parts of the country that we might not have ever experienced otherwise. Some of those sites have become pictures that will forever be ingrained upon my memory. Moments that I believe God wanted me to experience.

Whenever we encounter a setback, we need to search out new opportunities that introduce themselves in that moment. Much like Paul's time in prison, if we remain focused on our goals, most especially on the goals God has in mind for us, we *will* most assuredly make a difference, even when life seems to take us off course. I believe it is all a part of God's purpose for us.

Prayer: Lord, help me find clarity about my purpose. Help me remember that I ultimately can find gratifying purpose when I pursue you, purpose that you have designed for me. Lord, as I work to understand my purpose more fully, I pray that, as Paul, your joy would be present. I pray for grace and wisdom. Help me to serve your needs above my own, even above others. Help me walk daily in dependence of you. In Jesus' name. Amen.