

Field Guide and Leader Guide 2.1.26

Scripture Reference

Philippians 1:12-18

Summary

Expedition Field Guide:

Synopsis

Most of us know the feeling of walking a path that seems promising, praying over it, investing time and hope, only to watch doors close one by one. Discouragement creeps in quietly. We start assuming the obstacle means the end - the end of a dream, a calling, or a season we thought God had clearly invited us into. When progress stalls long enough, we often stop asking altogether, convinced we have exhausted every possible option.

Paul writes to the Philippians from a place that looked like total derailment. Imprisoned, restricted, and sidelined from the missionary life he loved, he refuses to interpret obstacles as defeat. Instead, he reframes them as God clearing another way. What felt like limitation became expansion. What looked like loss became advance. Joy, for Paul, was not rooted in circumstances improving, but in trusting that God was still actively at work in the midst of resistance.

Questions and Follow-Ups

1. **Describe and talk about why obstacles feel so discouraging.**
 - What emotions or assumptions tend to surface first when something blocks your path?
 - How do obstacles challenge your sense of control, timing, or expectations of God?
2. **What past discouraging obstacle in your life resulted in God clearing another way that was ultimately good?**
 - Looking back, what did God teach you through that season that you could not have learned otherwise?
 - How does remembering that story help you face current obstacles differently?

3. Where might you be mistaking limitation for failure instead of considering how God could be clearing another way?

- Are there specific areas where you feel “stuck” or sidelined right now?
- What would it look like to ask God what He might be doing instead of asking why He stopped something?

4. How does Paul’s response to imprisonment challenge the way you interpret delays, setbacks, or unanswered prayers?

- What stands out most to you about Paul’s attitude or perspective in Philippians 1?
- How might joy change if you trusted that God was advancing His work even in your waiting?

Scripture References

Philippians 1:12–18 (ESV)

Conclusion

Paul’s joy is not denial. He does not pretend prison is pleasant or opposition is easy. His joy comes from perspective. He sees that the gospel is advancing in ways he never could have planned. Guards hear about Jesus. Believers grow bolder. The message spreads beyond Paul’s reach, carried by circumstances that once felt like loss. God does not merely work around obstacles - He often works through them.

Ultimately, Paul’s confidence flows from the story of Jesus Himself. Jesus was arrested, silenced, mocked, and killed, and what appeared to be final defeat became the doorway to salvation for the world. Sin and death stood as the greatest obstacle humanity had ever faced, and God turned the cross into the greatest advance. When we face resistance we do not understand, we are invited to trust the same God who turns obstacles into open roads and despair into joy for the journey.