

**Living Above Your Circumstances**  
**Series: J.O.Y. Jesus, Others, and You - #2**  
**A Study of the Book of Philippians**

**Text: Philippians 1:12–21**

**Introduction:** On July 15, 1986, Roger Clemens came to bat in his first Major League Baseball All-Star game. Roger was the sizzling right-handed pitcher for the Boston Red Sox, and he had been named to the American League All-Star team as the starting pitcher.

In the second inning, the time came when it was his turn to bat. But that was something Roger Clemens was not used to because the American League had the designated-hitter rule—someone else always batted for him. But here, in the All-Star game between the American League and the National League, they alternated each year between the rules of the two leagues. This particular year, they played by National League rules—pitchers had to bat for themselves.

So, Roger Clemens found himself coming to bat for the first time.

He took a few practice swings in the on-deck circle, and then he stepped into the batter's box at home plate. Out on the mound was the best pitcher in the National League—Dwight Gooden. The year before, Dwight had won the Cy Young Award—given to the best pitcher in all of baseball. A pitcher who never batted was facing the best pitcher in all of baseball.

Dwight Gooden wound up and threw a white-hot, streaking fastball that blew by Roger Clemens. Roger stepped out of the box, blinked his eyes a few times, and turned to the catcher Gary Carter. "Gary, is that what my pitches look like?" "You bet it is!" Gary said.

Roger Clemens stepped back into the box, and he quickly struck out. But when he went back onto the pitcher's mound to pitch for his team, he threw three perfect innings—nobody on the other team got a hit. He was voted the game's Most Valuable Player. And from that day on, he would tell people he had greater confidence in his own pitching.

**Once he understood how powerful his own fastball was, he pitched with all the confidence in the world.**

How could we as a church get that same confidence that God is working in us to win people to the Lord and build them up in the faith?

What could we see, what could we visualize, that would tell us that God is working in us, making us a church that would offer people a place of Bible teaching, joyful fellowship, and spiritual growth?

It's not just a question for a church, but also for individuals. What would give you confidence that God is genuinely loves you? What would give you confidence that He's part of your life, that you belong to Him, and that He's working in you and through you?

We saw last week that as the apostle Paul was in prison, he wrote a letter to the small church at Philippi, and wrote, ***"I'm confident that God has begun a good work in you, and I'm confident that he'll continue that work until it's complete."***

**[Go with me to the book of Philippians, chapter 1 as we continue our series, J.O.Y. – Jesus, Others and You. Beginning with verse 12, Paul says,](#)**

***12Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. 13As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.***

***15It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.***

***Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (NIV)***

## **Let's Pray**

The title of today's message is **"HOW TO LIVE ABOVE YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES."** I want to begin by first telling you about four ways to make your life miserable.

## 1. If you want to make your life miserable, WAIT TO BE HAPPY UNTIL THE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE RIGHT.

If you do that, guess how long you will wait. Forever! Notice a phrase Paul uses in verse 12. "...*what has happened to me...*" He uses the same phrase again in verse 19. So, what is he talking about, what happened to him.

**Paul's Story:** Five years earlier he was worshiping with friends in the temple in Jerusalem. Some Jews who hated him started a rumor that Paul has brought a detested Gentile into the sacred Jewish temple.

The false rumor spreads outside the temple and into the city. People believe it and some hotheads decide to do something about it. They instigate a mob, rush into the temple, and drag Paul out of the sanctuary and begin to beat him.

The Roman commander who's responsible for keeping order in the city hears about the riot. He rushes to the courtyard with some soldiers and gets there just in time to rescue a bloody Paul. He assumes Paul has done something wrong to inflame the crowd, so he arrests him on the spot.

Paul looks at the soldier in charge and says, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't been found guilty of anything?"

Now the commander is worried, too. He's arrested a Roman citizen without any real charge against him. That night the commander gets word that forty men have vowed that they won't eat or drink until they've killed Paul. Their plan is to kill him the next day, as he is being transported to Caesarea.

The commander sends Paul off in the dead of night, protected by 500 men, to the coastal city to meet the Roman governor, Felix.

Several days later, the accusers arrive in Caesarea. During the proceedings, Felix begins to realize that Paul defends himself well, and he seems to have a lot of friends on the outside. Felix begins to think maybe some of these friends would be willing to pay some money to grease the wheels for Paul's release. He keeps Paul in custody for two years, because of corrupt officials.

After two years in custody, a new governor comes to replace Felix. The Jewish leaders try again. The new governor thinks that if he sets up a trial in the city of Jerusalem, where the events happened, he'll be closer to the scene, and maybe he'll find more reliable witnesses and evidence. So, he asks Paul: Are you willing to go to Jerusalem where we can settle this thing once and for all?

Paul knows if he goes back to Jerusalem, they'll find a way to kill him. So, he plays the last card available to him as a Roman citizen: he appeals to Caesar, which is like appealing to the Supreme Court.

Within a few months, Paul and some other prisoners are put on a ship and sent off to Rome. Several days out, rough weather hits and slows their progress. Paul has a sense from the Lord that if they keep going, they'll meet disaster. He urges them to stay at the nearest harbor and wait for spring, but the three leaders in charge of the ship don't want to do that.

The owner of the ship wants to get his merchandise to Rome and make his profit. The Roman commander wants to turn his prisoners over to Rome and be rid of the responsibility. And the captain of the ship, suddenly seeing that they have a few hours of a gentle breeze, agrees it's safe to continue.

After a couple more days at sea, the gentle breeze turns into hurricane force winds, and driven without control, the ship crashes into rocks near an island and breaks apart. God had shown Paul in a dream that they would all be saved, and amazingly, everyone makes it to shore, and they spend the winter on the island. When Spring comes, another ship takes them to Rome. Where we now find Paul chained to a guard 24/7 to ensure he doesn't disappear until his case comes before Caesar.

Paul spends the next two years under house arrest in Rome. Paul can receive visitors in the house, but the chains never leave his wrists.

Every six hours a new Roman guard takes over. Paul can't move unless the guard moves with him. When he sleeps, he must arrange himself so that the chains don't get under his head or his body. And even though he has no source of income, he still must pay the rent on the house, or he'll be put in a dungeon.

Paul isn't sure what'll happen if and when he finally does appear before Caesar. The thought might have occurred to him: This isn't fair. Why is this happening to me? But that isn't what he thinks.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Thinking of life not being fair: Back in 1921, a missionary couple named David & Svea Flood went with their 2-year-old son from Sweden to the heart of Africa – to what was then called the Belgian Congo. They met up with another Scandinavian couple, the Ericksons, & soon the 4 of them felt led by the Lord to move out of the central mission station & take the gospel to one of the more remote areas of the Congo.

At the village of N'dolera the chief would not let them enter his town for fear of alienating the local gods. So, the two couples decided to go half a mile away & build their own huts.

They prayed for a spiritual breakthrough, but there was none. Their only contact with the villagers was a young boy, who was allowed to sell them chickens & eggs twice a week.

Svea Flood decided that if this boy was the only African she could talk to, she would try to lead him to Jesus. Over a period of time she succeeded.

Meanwhile, malaria struck one member of their little group after another. In time the Ericksons decided they had had enough suffering & left for the relative security of the central mission station.

Then, in the middle of this primitive wilderness, Svea found herself pregnant. When the time came for her to give birth, the village chief allowed a midwife to help her. A little girl was born, they named Aina.

The delivery was difficult, & Svea was already weak from malaria. The birth process was a heavy blow to her stamina, and she died 17 days later.

Inside David Flood, something snapped. He dug a crude grave, buried his 27-year-old wife, & then took his children back to the central mission station.

Giving his newborn daughter to the Ericksons, he said, "I'm going back to Sweden. I've lost my wife; I can't take care of this baby. God has ruined my life." With that, he left, rejecting not only his calling, but God Himself.

Sometimes things happen, even in the lives of those who seek to walk closest to Him. And in all of life our first thought is *Why is this happening to me?* It's not fair. Not fair that I didn't make the team, didn't get the job, that my loved one died too soon.

If you asked Paul, "Is it fair, what's happened to you?" he'd say, "No." If you asked him, "Has it been fun? Is it something you would have chosen for your life?" he'd say, "Of course not."

But, as he looks over the past five years of his life—with the mob beating, the unjust imprisonment, the shipwreck, and now the round-the-clock chains—his concern is not *"Is it fair?"* but *"Is it accomplishing anything for God?"*

Notice how this shows up in verse 12: ***"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel."***

The question Paul asks is: **Is what's happening to me accomplishing something for God? Is what's happening to me being useful to God in some way? Is it furthering his purposes in the world?**

According to verses 12–13, people are hearing the gospel and believing on Christ. The whole palace guard, he says, is learning about Christ.

The palace guard was a very specialized, handpicked, military group. They were Caesar's own personal bodyguards—strong, courageous, brilliant, sophisticated young men—kind of a mixture of West Point and the Secret Service. They served as the palace guard for 12 years, protecting Caesar and guarding the prisoners that had appealed to him.

After 12 years they transitioned into other influential careers. Some went on to be the commanding generals of large forces. Others went into public office and became senators or ambassadors to other countries. Still others advanced into the top echelons of business and industry.

As a group, they would be the movers and shakers of the future, the opinion leaders, and kingmakers of the next generation. They were a powerful and strategic group of young men. If you wanted to influence the Roman Empire, you couldn't pick a better group to start with.

Everyday Paul, for two years one of them wore the other end of his chain and for six hours had to stay within four feet of him. **Paul doesn't think he's their prisoner; he thinks they're his prisoner. He's not chained to them; they're chained to him.**

During the early months, the guards assumed Paul was like other prisoners—guilty of some crime like leading a political revolt or embezzling huge sums of money. But as they got to know him, and as they listened in on the conversations he had with his friends, it wasn't long until it became clear that he was in chains because of someone called Christ.

Over the months, as their rotations kept coming around and they put on the chain, he would talk with them about Christ more and more, and minister to them. Their conversations might have gone something like this:

Hi Titus, it's good to see you again. It's been several days. How's Valentina? Last time you told me she had been running a fever, and getting weaker, and the doctors didn't know why. I prayed for her. I asked God to heal her. How is she? Oh, good. Awesome! I'm glad for her and for you!

And so, this would go, guard after guard hearing about Christ, believing on Christ and telling others about Christ. You could call it a **chain reaction**.

Paul says, "Because of what is happening to me, not only is the Word getting to Caesar's people, but also because I'm facing this with courage and joy, brothers and sisters are being encouraged. And that matters more to Paul than his personal convenience or the fairness of his situation.

Is it possible that what happens to us might be God's way of accomplishing something for himself?

The happiness illusion that people have is: **I believe I will be happy if I get whatever circumstance I desire**. One of the most reliable findings in all the happiness research is people are terrible at predicting the things they think will make them happy, but we all do this. "If I just had this job, this salary, this house, this marriage, this car, this body, this lifestyle, then I would be happy."

The problem with all those things is not that they don't make us happy; it's that happiness is short-lived. People get it, and then they're only happy for a little while and they think, "I must have wanted the wrong thing."

The truth is you didn't want the wrong thing, and you're not the only person who feels that way, because happiness is a feeling. Feelings are hard to define, but we all know them when we experience them. Feeling is an emotion. It's either something pleasant, and I'm drawn to it, or it's something that is unpleasant, and I don't like it.

The word happy comes from an old Icelandic word, ***happ***, and it's related to the words to happen, happenings, happenstance or even haphazard. Happy is my feeling when something I like happens to me. We live for happy, but it comes, and it goes based on what happens.

Dallas Willard says the fruit of the Spirit are not feelings. They are what might be called conditions. That is, it's someone settled character. It is their life orientation, and therefore, it is stable no matter what the circumstances.

For instance, ***love*** is a fruit of the Spirit.

Here's what's interesting. If I crave the feeling of being loved or being in love, I will never do the hard work I need to do to enter the condition of being permeated by love, being someone constantly in touch with being loved by God and able to love others with the same love.

**Peace** is a fruit of the Spirit. Dallas says peace is the soul at rest in God, that results from an assurance of how things will turn out. Peace is when my will isn't under constant straining and striving because I know God is in control.

If I idolize having a peaceful, easy feeling, then when I don't have that feeling I'll avoid conflict, medicate myself, or just stop interacting with others. I will not do the hard work required to enter the condition of being a person who is at peace in God where the peace of Christ is reigning in my heart, as Paul says.

**Again, If I idolize the feeling, I will never enter into the condition.**

**Joy** is another condition. Joy is a pervasive sense of well-being. Only God can bring this. Joy is not a feeling. Joy involves choices, but it is a condition into which we grow. We are joyful because of Jesus. He taught about it. He died to obtain it for us, and He was resurrected to ensure we have the fullness of joy.

Paul, in chains in prison, had a pervasive sense of well-being no matter what his circumstances were. Sometimes when we greet each other, we'll ask, "How are you doing?" and occasionally somebody will say, "***I am doing okay under the circumstances.***" Have you ever heard of that?

**Paul didn't live under the circumstances. He realized he was seated in heavenly places in Christ and since God is over the circumstances, he lived over the circumstances with joy that was unspeakable and full of glory.**

We must learn to say with Paul, "The question is not, 'Is what's happening to me fair?' but instead, 'Is what's happening to me accomplishing something for God? Is what's happening to me being useful to God in some way? Is it furthering his purposes in the world?'" And when we see that it is, we rejoice.

If you want to make yourself miserable, wait for circumstances to make you happy. If you want to live in joy, don't ask, "***God, why is this happening to me?***" ask "***God, where are you in these circumstances? Who can I help in these circumstances? Who can I serve today in these circumstances?***"

**2. If you want to make your life miserable, COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS.**



Notice what Paul says. *"...some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains."*

Notice these people who are jealous and envious and compare themselves. They're not folks outside the church; they're in the church. Instead of focusing on their own lives, they were thinking, "Hey, look at Paul. Paul is more successful than I am, and if I do better than Paul, I will feel better about myself."

Many people do this. We compare our marriage to somebody else's. If it's better, easier, or happier than mine, I'm miserable. We compare our salary, our house, our career, our kids, our looks, our education, our level of success, and when we envy somebody, not only am I unhappy because of what I'm NOT getting, I'm unhappy because of what they ARE getting. **We would be LESS miserable if the people we envy were MORE miserable.**

A woman dies. She goes to the gates of heaven. Saint Peter says, "To get in all you have to do is spell one word correctly." She asks, "What's the word?" He says, "Love." L.O.V.E. - She gets right in. A while later, Peter asks if she could watch the gate for him for a few hours. Much to her surprise, her husband shows up, and she asks him, "How have you been?"

He says, "Well, actually quite well. You remember that beautiful young nurse who took care of you while you were dying? I married her, and then I won the lottery and sold the little house where you and I lived and bought a great big, beautiful house. My beautiful new wife and I were skiing in the Swiss Alps when I fell off the side of the mountain, so here I am. I'm glad I made it to heaven. How do I get in?" She said, "You have to spell one word correctly." He said, "Ok, what's the word?" She said, "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious."

You will never see a happy jealous person, or a happy envious person. Paul talks about two groups of people. Some people watched Paul's ministry and said, "Thank God," and other people watched the same thing and said, "Why God? Why him and not me? Why can't I be as successful as him?"

One Stanford researcher did a study on comparison. Their hypothesis was unhappy people must compare up. That is, they look at people who have **more** money, **more** success, **more** possessions, and it makes them unhappy.

The opposite must be true, happy people compare down. They look at people who have *less* money, *less* success, *less* education, and it makes them happy.

**What they discovered was happy people don't compare at all.** They don't compare up. They don't compare down. They use deeply held internal values as the yardstick for how they're doing. They take pleasure in other people's successes. They show concern for other people's failures.

**If there's somebody in your life who you envy, if you wrestle with comparison, pray for that person.**

### **3. If you want to make your life miserable, go it alone.**

Do it all by yourself. One of the biggest misconceptions about the apostle Paul is that people saw him as this brilliant but cranky, difficult guy. But if you ever read his letters closely, you see a different picture.

Paul says to the people he's writing, ***"I thank my God every time I remember you."*** He says to them, ***"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy..."*** Look at the emotion. ***"It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart..."***

He calls them his brothers and sisters, and he pours his life out for them, and it fills them with joy.

There was another study on longevity that was done. The researchers for this one, their hypothesis was the people who would live the longest would be the people who had someone to care for and watch over them. What they found was those who had someone to care for lived the longest. Jesus said a long time ago, "...the Son of Man comes not to be served, but ***to serve...***"

Paul says in verse 25, ***"I'd love to go be with God, but I think if I keep on living it will bring joy to your faith, so I'm going to do that."***

Researchers consistently find in any relationship, when there is a ratio of about five encouraging, hope-filled, positive, comments for every one negative, difficult comment, the relationship is likely to flourish.

John Gottlieb, who is a leading marriage researcher says he can predict whether a marriage will end in divorce with over a 90 percent accuracy level based on hearing a husband and wife talk to each other for less than five minutes. If that ratio is lower than five to one, the relationship is probably headed for trouble.

The same thing is true in families and in churches. That's why the writer of Hebrews says, "***Let us encourage each other daily.***" Make this a habit.

#### **4. If you want to make your life miserable, settle for just optimism.**

You say pastor, don't you mean pessimism? NO! There is a lot being studied and written about optimism. One writer distinguishes between what he calls little optimism and big optimism. Little optimism focuses on little hopes. "I hope I'll find a convenient parking space when I go shopping. I hope the sermon is almost over." **(It's not, by the way.)**

BIG optimism focuses on the BIG picture. God is working when we don't see it for feel. God has big plans for my life.

Optimism as a personality trait is mostly good, but sometimes optimism isn't good. Sometimes young people can be overly optimistic and say, "I can smoke without getting cancer." "I can have sex outside of marriage." "I can do whatever I want, it won't affect me." Optimism must be based in reality.

Either you decide what's important in your life or other people will decide what's important.

**STORY:** Kenneth Dodge talks about an 8-year-old boy named Frank. Frank had a date with his father to go fishing one Saturday. On Friday night Frank laid everything out and was ready to go. But on Saturday morning he awoke to discover it was raining and they couldn't go fishing. So, 8-year-old Frank grumbled and griped and complained all morning. He kicked the furniture, the dog, and the cat. Nothing was right. His father tried to explain that the farmers needed the rain. But that didn't satisfy Frank. Repeatedly he complained, "Why does it have to rain TODAY?"

About noon the clouds broke, and the sun came out. His dad said, "We can't go fishing all day, but at least we can fish this afternoon. Let's go!" So, they jumped into the truck and went to the lake. They stayed all afternoon and caught more fish than ever before. They had the time of their lives!

When they came home, they cooked some fish for supper. As they were sitting down to eat, Frank's dad asked him to say the blessing. 8-year-old Frank prayed, "***God, if I sounded a little grumpy earlier today, it was because I couldn't see far enough ahead.***"

That's the problem, isn't it? Most of the time, we just can't see far enough ahead. That's where Romans 8:28 thinking helps. ***"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."***

The promise is not that if you love God, only good things happen in your life.

The promise is not that if you love God, the bad things aren't really that bad.

The promise is that God will take everything, and He'll work them for good in their entirety.

Paul has an attitude about life that is so powerful the word optimistic won't do. That's what I mean by don't just be optimistic. In fact, in this passage Paul creates a word to describe what it's like for him when he gets up in every morning.

Sitting in prison not knowing what his future will be like, whether he's going to live or die, Paul wakes up in the morning, saying, ***"I eagerly expect and hope."***

I look at my chains, the guard I'm chained to, and ***"I eagerly expect and hope."***

***Verse 20 says, I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."***

What are you going to do with a guy like that? How are you going to stop a guy like that? What prison can hold a guy like that? That is not little optimism or even big optimism. For Paul it was all about Christ.

**So, if you want to make your life miserable, wait to be happy until the circumstance is right, compare yourself with others, go it alone, and settle for just being optimistic. But if you want to live above your circumstances, then realize this:**

For Paul, life is summed up in Christ. He is inspired by Christ, guided by Christ, loved by Christ, held by Christ, sustained by Christ, intoxicated by Christ. He serves Christ. He loves Christ. He follows Christ. He trusts Christ. He lives for Christ. Christ is his all-consuming obsession and orientation to reality, and therefore...when he faces problems, he has this great two-word question in verse 18, ***"But what does it matter?"***

I have all these problems, but what does it matter?" In Greek, it's snarky. It's just two tiny little words. **Tis gar!** Meaning, ***So what? Big deal. Who cares? No problem! Whatever!***

The car broke down. "So what? We can get it fixed."

The pastor messed up; he mispronounced a word again. "So what? We can't pronounce some of those bible names either.

Failure? Disappointment? Chains? Prisons? Rivals? Suffering? Poverty? "So what?" The important thing is, Christ was crucified, resurrected, and the kingdom of God, up there, is now down here, because of Christ in us, and I get to be a part of that.

[Let's go back to our Missionary Story – Eight months later both Ericksons were stricken with an illness & died within days of each other. The baby was turned over to some American missionaries, who changed her Swedish name from Aina to "Aggie" & took her with them back to America.](#)

[As a young woman, she attended North Central Bible College in Minneapolis. There she met & married a young man named Dewey Hurst. In time her husband became president of a Christian college in Seattle.](#)

[One day a Swedish religious magazine appeared in her mailbox. She had no idea who had sent it, & she couldn't read the words. But as she turned the pages, all of a sudden, she saw a photo, in a primitive setting of a grave with a white cross - & on the cross were the words "\*\*Svea Flood.\*\*" \*\*Her mother.\*\*](#)

[Aggie jumped in her car & went straight to a college faculty member who, could translate the article. He said the story was about missionaries who had come to N'dolera long ago ... the birth of a white baby girl ... the death of the young mother ... the one little African boy who had been led to Christ ... & how, after the missionaries had all left, the boy had grown up & finally persuaded the chief to let him build a school in the village.](#)

[The article said that gradually he won all his students to Christ ... & the children led their parents to Christ ... even the chief had become a Christian. Today there were 600 Christian believers in that one village alone ...All because of the sacrifice of David & Svea Flood.](#)

[For the Hurst's 25th wedding anniversary, the college presented them with the gift of a vacation to Sweden. There Aggie sought to find her real father.](#)

An old man now, David Flood had remarried, fathered 4 more children, & generally wasted his life with alcohol.

After an emotional reunion with her half-brothers & half-sister, Aggie brought up the subject of seeing her father. "You can talk to him," they replied, "but you need to know that whenever he hears the name of God, he flies into a rage."

Aggie walked into the squalid apartment, with liquor bottles everywhere, & approached the 73-year-old man lying in a rumpled bed.

"Papa?" she said tentatively. He turned toward her & began to cry. "Aina," he said. "I never meant to give you away." "It's all right, Papa," she replied, "God took care of me."

"I have a story to tell you. You didn't go to Africa in vain. Mama didn't die in vain. The little boy you won to the Lord grew up to win that whole village to Jesus Christ. The one seed you planted just kept growing & growing. Today there are 600 African people serving the Lord because you were faithful to the call of God in your life ...."

And by the end of the afternoon, he had come back to the God he had resented for so many decades.

A few years later, the Hursts were attending an evangelism conference in London, England, when a report was given from the nation of Zaire (the former Belgian Congo).

The leader of the national church, representing some 110,000 baptized believers, spoke eloquently of the gospel's spread in his nation. Aggie could not help going to ask him afterward if he had ever heard of David & Svea Flood.

"Yes, madam," the man replied, "It was Svea Flood who led me to Jesus Christ. I was the boy who brought food to your parents before you were born. To this day your mother's grave & her memory are honored by."

In time Aggie Hurst & her husband went to Africa. They were welcomed by cheering throngs of villagers. The most dramatic moment, of course, was when the pastor escorted Aggie to see her mother's white cross for herself.

Later that day, in the church, the pastor read from [John 12:24](#), "**I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground & dies, it**

remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” He then followed with [Psalm 126:5](#), “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.”

### Conclusion

God doesn't promise that your circumstances will be fair. But he does promise that there will always be something in them that will serve Christ's purposes. There will always be a word to speak, a kindness to offer, a prayer to lift up before the throne of God. There will always be something for Christ in your circumstances. Look for it.

What happens to us can serve to advance the gospel. And the joy of life comes when we can honestly say, "It's not about me, Lord. It's only about you."

Paul says, I can tell you today, no matter what happens to me tomorrow, I will continue to rejoice because joy is not a feeling of happiness based on what happens; it is a condition of my soul. It is a pervasive sense of well-being.

It is the only rational response to the resurrection of the Redeemer. It is the eager expectation and hope that makes prisoners filled with anticipation at what God and Father stands ready to do.

Maybe right now you're in a prison. A prison called lonely, or a prison called cancer, or a prison called fear, failure, or a prison called hopelessness. This is what God would say to you right now and what God said to Paul in that prison 2,000 years ago – ***Tis Gar, So what, "...To live is Christ and to die is gain."***