

Great Co-Missionaries, A Great Investment, Philippians 1:12-14, 1/25/24

When I graduated college I was looking for a job, but I couldn't find anything...after all, who is hiring a 22 year old with a degree in Bible? So a guy in my church said, well I can get you a job at a Harley Davidson machine shop. "Wow, Harley Davidson? I get to be around the bikes. Maybe I can even learn to ride one of them. That sounds kind of cool." Not cool. My job was in a poorly ventilated warehouse, drilling holes into 1x1 pieces of metal for 8 hours a day. The most exciting part of my day was when the drill bit broke and I got to walk across the warehouse to get a new one. Not only were there no Harleys, there wasn't even a picture of a Harley. I asked my boss, "So what are these cogs for anyway?" "They are part of the piece that makes the side mirrors move." Oh, how exciting. Now I didn't last long in that job, but there were many days when I thought to myself, "Why am I here?" This is not what I planned for myself, this isn't what I wanted, I'm miserable in this job, I'm working with people I wouldn't have chosen to be in my life. What a waste of my time!"

Have you ever asked yourself at a time in your life, "Why am I here?" "Why am I in these circumstances? Why am I in this job? In Wilmington or Delco, or in this apartment complex with these people? Why am I back living in my parents' basement? At this school? Why am I stuck in this hospital bed?

Now, God doesn't tell us all the answers to our biggest why questions- this is part of the journey of trusting Him with the unknown. But he hasn't left us walking blindly. But what if one of the answers to the why am I here question we know for sure. **What if God's answer to why is always who?** What if you are in this season of life, in this place, FOR these people that God has placed into your life at such a time as this? This is the powerful perspective that the Apostle Paul learned and teaches us in Philippians 1 and it has the power to unlock a new joy, mission and sense of purpose, even if you find yourself in hard season and a life we would not have chosen.

12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me... Pause here. What happened to Paul? Well we know from the book of Acts and this letter that Paul writing during a **season of life he didn't choose**. He went from preaching the gospel in amphitheatres, seeing hundreds of people begin following Jesus, powerful displays of the Holy Spirit, planting churches all over the Roman empire, and suddenly all of that came to a screeching halt on his 3rd Missionary Journey in 61AD. He's arrested, and being held on charges of insurrection. And he was being held in a **place he didn't choose**- He was on house arrest in Rome, unable to leave a small house that became a prison for two years. And he was with **people he didn't choose**- Day and night, he was chained to a Roman soldier. When Paul went to the bathroom; the guard came with him. Paul slept; the guard came with him. Do you think if you were Paul you might be asking, "Why am I here?" He's only human. Why am I stuck here when I could be preaching the gospel, planting churches, I could be useful to the kingdom, this is a waste of time!

And yet, listen to the perspective that God had to teach Paul that unlocked the answer to the why. ***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.***

For Paul, he came to learn a **Great Co-Missionary perspective**- that the answer to why was who. Do you see it? The palace guard, also called the praetorian guard were kind of like the secret service of the Roman Empire. They were a regime of soldiers assigned to guard high profile prisoners (like Paul), high ranking officials and members of the emperor's family. 2-3x a day for 2 years, these guards would cycle through their duty being chained to the Apostle Paul...the greatest evangelist in the history of the church. What do you think these men observed about Paul's character and way of life during these 730 days? What do you think their conversations were like over the 17,520 hours they had together? What impact do you think it had on these men to observe the body of Christ, coming to bring Paul food, and clothes, and take care of him and pray for him and be with him? Do you think all this made an impact on these guys? The love of God and the gospel of Jesus was being demonstrated and declared to every one of these soldiers. And some of them became followers of Jesus. How do we know that? Listen to Paul's final words to the church in Philippi. **Philippians 4:²¹ Greet all God's people in Christ Jesus. The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings. ²² All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.**

Wait, you mean to say that some of Caesar's own household became followers of Jesus? How in the world did that happen? The palace guard! These same soldiers who came to faith, maybe their next assignment was guarding Emperor Nero, or the emperor's wife Octavia, or his children, or his senators. And guess what they did? They were sharing their faith story with their own families, their friends, their coworkers, and others in the palace!

What kind of impact do you think hearing these amazing stories about the advancement of the gospel in hard and influential places like this had on the churches Paul wrote to? **Philippians 1¹⁴ And 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.**

They were emboldened. It lit a fire under them to demonstrate and declare the gospel even more. Why? Because if God can advance the gospel in hard places like house arrest and hard people like the palace guards he was chained to- certainly God can advance the gospel through everyday places and people they are in relationship with. Their family, friends, their jobs, their synagogue, their neighbors they were in relationship with.

Paul learned to have a **Great Co-Missionary perspective** for his life. That whatever the season and place he was in, whether he was doing what he loved- preaching in amphitheaters and planting churches or in hard seasons and the hard places that he didn't choose- God had gospel plans to reach people who were far away for him, and bring them into a loving, secure, saving, life-changing relationship with Jesus forever.

Now this is as far as we want to go in the text, because I want to talk about you and me. What When it comes to the season and places and people in our lives- whether it's what chose or didn't choose, whether it's in a hard season and a hard place, or in a blessed season in the job, school, neighborhood that you always dreamed of, **Do you have a great co-missionary perspective?** That the answer to why is who? God has placed you in the season and the place you find yourself in for the people he wants you to demonstrate and declare the gospel.

Let me give you an example happening as we speak of what this looks like in real life. It starts with **David and Alyssa [Hashtag Slide]** a Christian couple who have a great co-missionary mindset when it comes to their neighborhood here in Wilmington. Over the years they have gotten to know their neighbors Dana and her son, Ayden. They have been praying for them for years and looking for opportunities to show the love of Christ and share the gospel. Ayden got into some serious trouble with the law and ended up incarcerated at Howard R. Young, a prison in Wilmington. David and Alyssa happen to be friends with Steve and Rochelle Anderson, members here- Steve is a chaplain at Howard R Young, one of our partners. And so they help make a connection so that Chaplain Steve can reach out to Ayden. Pause that for a moment.

Meanwhile **Steve [Hashtag Slide]**, a Great Co-missionary has been ministering to Jamel, a former Muslim who is incarcerated, has been doing Bible study with him and who recently gave his life to Jesus and is seeing breakthroughs in his life. Now Jamel is beginning to see his life through a Great Co-missionary lens. Well guess who ends up in the same pod as Jamel? Ayden!

Now **Jamel [Hashtag Slide]** starts to befriend Ayden and read the Bible with him and tell him about what Jesus did for him. Jamel came to Chaplain Steve recently and said, I think Ayden is ready to give his life to Jesus. Steve said, "If I had to pick one person for Ayden to be around it would have been Jamel. God made it happen before it crossed my mind."

[Title Slide] This is what a Great Co-missionary perspective looks like- an investment in relationships for the sake of the gospel. Now listen, if God can use the hard season and hard place that the Apostle Paul and Steve and Jamel and Ayden found themselves in- don't you think he can use the everyday seasons and places and people you are in relationship with.

To get the gospel to advance in Caesar's own household, God sent Paul to Rome on house arrest. To reach people like Jamel and Ayden, God sent David and Alyssa to their neighborhood and Chaplain Steve to prison. Let me ask you a question- How do you get the gospel to advance at JP Morgan Chase- give you a job there! How do you get the gospel to advance in Maris Grove- give you an apartment there. How do you get the gospel to advance at Concord High School- give you a desk and a locker there. How do you get the gospel to advance among the underserved and vulnerable community in Wilmington? Put Lyn Doyle at Urban Promise, and some of us to serve there. Do you see it? You might be the closest example of Jesus that your co-worker or neighbor might have to seeing Jesus.

Looking back now at my days at the Harley Davidson machine shop, I see that the answer to why was who. I see all the missed gospel opportunities, like the 20 something guy that was on the drill next to me listening to the Howard Stern show every morning who hated his life and had a drinking problem. Day after day I had gospel opportunities and yet I missed them. I don't want to miss those opportunities anymore, and I don't want you to either.

Ask Pastor Terry to come up. Pastor Terry and I have been praying and thinking through- what if our whole church had a Great Co-missionary perspective? What if our whole church began investing in relationships where they live, work and play? This is one of our key priorities "Reaching our Community" over the next three years. We are going to launch a 6 month

initiative from now to August that everyone can get involved in. Pastor Terry is going to share with you what it looks like.

Terry:

What if, in the next six months, you could not only impact the lives of eight people but also witness new growth within yourself? **What if this could fit into your normal rhythm and routine,** without adding extra tasks to your to-do list? Intrigued?

Consider this: Statistically, two out of three individuals in our region aren't regular churchgoers, likely feeling far from God and lacking genuine relationship with Him. This means it's quite likely that one of your neighbors or the person you sit next to at school or work represents someone that feels far from God.

We're thrilled to announce a laser-focused initiative, "Reaching Our Community," using MY HASHTAG — **the goal is to make "loving our neighbor" a regular event in our ordinary everyday lives.**

Central to Jesus' teachings is the enduring importance of loving our neighbors, a principle as vital today as it was 2000 years ago.

The invitation is to become an active co-missionary in the places you live, work and play. **Are you up for the Reaching Our Community 6-month challenge?**

Introduce MY HASHTAG (see MY HASHTAG Card, and walk through the wording on back)

MY HASHTAG is a simple strategy aimed at loving our neighbors. Engage in acts of love toward those you encounter daily. Embrace your unique responsibility to introduce Jesus in everyday life.

Who? | Look around—across the street, at work, school and the places you frequent. Your neighbors are those you encounter regularly—individuals in your circle, seen weekly. The goal is to identify who may not yet be walking with Jesus along the path of where you live, work and play.

Why 8? | With you in the center, MY HASHTAG identifies 8 people you commit to praying for and loving on, while patiently awaiting the right opportunity to introduce Jesus. One Hundred people is too many and one is too few! Start with 8 people—know their names, pray for them and personally care for / connect with each person.

Can I Do This? | Absolutely! This mission is designed for everyone, regardless of age or life stage. God has uniquely shaped and prepared you to extend His love to your MY HASHTAG.

Conclusion (Invite Worship Team Up)

While we hope you'll find that this fits into your current routine, that doesn't mean there won't be sacrifices. It will demand sacrificial time in prayer and intentional efforts to connect with someone new. Building relationships, especially in the Northeast, takes time and persistence.

Personally, I enjoy hiking in the Brandywine Valley, walking the path from the bottom of Mt. Lebanon Road to Thompson's Bridge and beyond. It's my favorite spot in Delaware, aside from Bethany Beach. This is a place where I go to think and pray. As I embark on this six-month season, I'm asking myself: "Can I invite a new friend on a hike?"

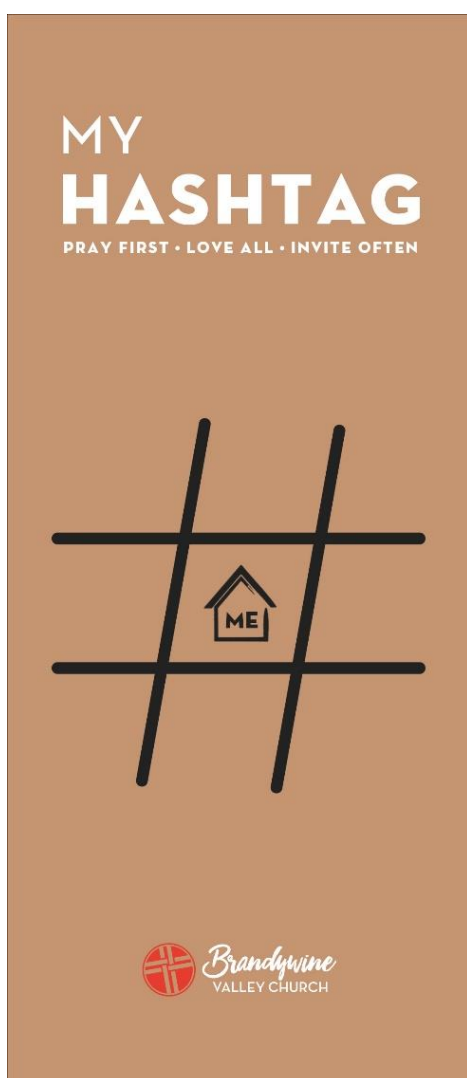
Our aim over the next six months, through prayer and loving action, is to introduce our neighbors to Jesus. Are you willing?

Handoff to Nate

Today, Begin with ONE name!

Take a moment now to write ONE NAME and let's PRAY FIRST.

Begin praying for them and start inviting them into your life—discover divine appointments, share a coffee, walk in the neighborhood, work out together, or collaborate on projects at work or school or in your wood shop. Over the next six months, amid your everyday life, we will collectively introduce our neighbors to Jesus.



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SIMPLE & IMPACTFUL, MY HASHTAG nurtures essential rhythms of our mission: Reaching Our Community.

Get more ideas at brandywine.church/myhashtag