LESSON 1 *December 27–January 2

**(page 4 of Standard Edition)**

# Persecuted *but* Not Forsaken



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Eph. 3:1; 2 Cor. 4:7–12; Acts 9:16; Philem. 15, 16; Col. 4:9; Phil. 1:1–3; Col. 1:1, 2.*

**Memory Text:** **"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"** *(Philippians 4:4, NKJV)***.**

An Adventist pastor, imprisoned on false charges, spent nearly two years behind bars. Though at first greatly perplexed, he realized the prison was his God-given mission field. When his fellow prisoners learned that he was a pastor, they asked him to preach. He did, and he gave out literature too. He even baptized prisoners and conducted Communion services.

"At times," he admitted, "it was difficult ministering in the prison, but there was also joy, especially when you saw prayers answered and lives changed."

Paul wrote Philippians and Colossians from prison *(see Phil. 1:7, Col. 4:3)*. In fact, in Philippi itself, after Paul and Silas were unjustly accused, the jailer put "their feet in the stocks" *(Acts 16:24, NKJV)*. At midnight, they were "praying and singing hymns to God, *and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25, NKJV; emphasis supplied)*. *Truly* they knew how to "rejoice always."

This week we'll look at the circumstances that Paul faced. He saw a larger purpose for what happened to him, and perhaps we can learn from him when we, as we inevitably do, face our own trials.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 3.*

# Paul, the Prisoner of Jesus Christ

Philippians and Colossians are called Prison Epistles because they were written while Paul was in prison (the others are Ephesians and Philemon). Most commentators think they were written while Paul was in prison, about A.D. 60–62 *(see Acts 28:16)*.

**Read Ephesians 3:1 and Philemon 1. What is the significance of how Paul characterizes his imprisonment?**

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Paul has given his life in service to Jesus Christ. If that service includes being a prisoner, he is ready. Paul describes himself as "an ambassador in chains" *(Eph. 6:20, NKJV)*. He had been on missionary journeys, raising up churches and training workers for the Lord. He may have asked, "Why am I here when I could be doing so much more without these chains?" Paul was also imprisoned later, when he wrote 2 Timothy, which is considered a Pastoral Epistle. So at least five books of the New Testament were written while he was in prison.

In none of the prison epistles does Paul mention exactly where he was imprisoned; thus, some have suggested either Ephesus or Caesarea. But there is no biblical evidence that Paul was ever imprisoned in Ephesus. Caesarea might seem a more likely possibility, except there is no apparent threat to Paul's life in this city. There definitely is that threat, however, by the time Philippians was written *(see Phil. 1:20, Phil. 2:17)*.

This epistle gives us some other clues as to where Paul was at the time of his imprisonment. First, there was a *praetorium*. This can refer to a provincial governor's official residence, like the one in Jerusalem, where Jesus was examined by Pilate *(Matt. 27:27, John 18:33)*, and in Caesarea, where Paul was imprisoned *(Acts 23:35)*. But Paul clearly uses this term not of a place but in reference to people. He says "the whole palace guard" became familiar with the gospel *(Phil. 1:13, NKJV)*. In Rome, these were elite soldiers, about fourteen thousand, who protected the emperor and guarded his prisoners.

Second, Paul also sends greetings from the believers in "Caesar's household" *(Phil. 4:22)*. This indicates that Paul was a prisoner in Rome and in contact with those who served the imperial household.

**How do we learn to make the best of whatever tough situation we find ourselves in? Why is that not always easy to do?**

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# Paul in Chains

While in Macedonia, Paul mentions multiple imprisonments *(2 Cor. 6:5, 2 Cor. 11:23, 2 Cor. 7:5)*. The first recorded instance was in Philippi *(Acts 16:16–24)*. Later he was imprisoned in Jerusalem briefly before being transferred to prison in Caesarea.

Elsewhere, Paul mentions being "in my chains" *(Philem. 10, 13, NKJV)*. Although under house arrest in Rome, he was chained to an elite Roman soldier. Ignatius, a Christian of the early second century who was chained up like this, described the soldiers as behaving like "wild beasts . . . who only get worse when they are well treated."—Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 231.

**Read 2 Corinthians 4:7–12. In this passage, what reveals how Paul was able to endure the trials he faced? What seems to be the focus of his life?**

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No matter how hard life got, Paul was able to see a brighter side, and that gave him courage to bear up under stress. Despite Satan hurling everything he could, Paul knew he was not forsaken.

**Read 2 Corinthians 6:3–7. What spiritual resources did Paul have available to help him face these difficulties?**

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Often, we may be tempted to look at our circumstances, our weaknesses, or our past failures and become discouraged. It's at times like these that we need to remember all the amazing provisions God has made for our success in battling evil. One of the most important is the Bible itself, "the word of truth," because we can learn from others' mistakes and also learn how these people have succeeded. Also, the Holy Spirit "makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

**How can we, as laity or as clergy, always "commend ourselves as ministers of God" *(2 Cor. 6:4, NKJV)*? What does that mean?**

# Paul in Philippi

During Paul's second missionary journey, shortly after Timothy was added to the team, they are forbidden by the Holy Spirit to continue across Asia Minor *(Acts 16:6)*. So, during a vision of the night, Paul sees a man pleading with him to " 'come over to Macedonia and help us' " *(Acts 16:9, NKJV)*. So, immediately they head to the seaport nearest Macedonia and sail from Troas across the Aegean Sea to Neapolis, on the European continent. But rather than evangelize there, Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, who joined them at Troas (as indicated by the use of "we" in Acts 16:11), head to Philippi.

In his evangelistic activity, Paul always thought strategically. Philippi was "the chief city of that part of Macedonia" *(Acts 16:12)*. In fact, it was one of the most honored cities of the Roman Empire, being given the status of *Ius Italicum*—the highest possible designation a city could be granted. Its citizens had the same privileges as if the city were located in Italy, including exemption from the land tax and the poll tax, and anyone born in the city automatically became a Roman citizen. It was also an important stop along the *Via Egnatia*, which was the main overland road connecting Rome with the East. Establishing an important Christian presence there enabled them to bring the gospel to many other nearby cities, including Amphipolis, Apollonia, Thessalonica, and Berea *(see Acts 17:1, 10)*.

Interestingly, the official language in first-century Philippi was Latin, evidenced by the predominance of Latin inscriptions. In Philippians 4:15, Paul even addresses them with a Latin-sounding name, *Philippēsioi*, apparently in recognition of their special Roman status. Nevertheless, Greek was the language of the marketplace and of the surrounding towns and cities and the means by which the gospel was spread. Luke describes how Paul and his team joined people for prayer by the riverside, where Lydia and her household were converted *(Acts 16:13–15)*. Being a businesswoman ("a seller of purple"), she would have been one of the major financial supporters in Philippi of Paul's ministry. The time Paul and Silas spent in prison there led to the conversion of another entire household—that of the jailer.

The Holy Spirit knew that Philippi would be the ideal beachhead for the spread of the gospel through Europe, even though there would also be persecution. However evil it is, persecution can, in certain circumstances, enable the gospel to reach people who otherwise might not be reached.

**Read Acts 9:16. How does this help us understand some of Paul's trials? How might this help us understand some of our own?**

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# Paul and Colossae

We have no record of Paul ever visiting Colossae, which again tells us something about the effectiveness of his evangelistic strategy. First, it was Epaphras, a resident of Colossae *(Col. 4:12)*, who brought the gospel to that city *(Col. 1:7)*. But how was he converted? Most likely, it was in the mid-50s, when Paul was in nearby Ephesus and "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus" *(Acts 19:10; compare Acts 20:31)*.

The book of Revelation witnesses to how widely the gospel spread throughout this area *(Rev. 1:4)*. The most plausible explanation for this success, including its spread to Colossae, is as a result of the work of Paul's converts, who first heard the message in Ephesus, the most important city in Asia Minor and a major port. Epaphras heard Paul's preaching in Ephesus and, becoming one of his coworkers, he took the gospel back to his hometown of Colossae.

The city itself, about nine miles (15 kilometers) southeast of Laodicea, is only now being excavated, so we know less about it compared to more prominent cities of the region. We do know it had a sizable Jewish population with "as many as ten thousand Jews living in that area of Phrygia." —Arthur G. Patzia, *New International Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1990), vol. 10, p. 3. Coins minted at Colossae indicate the people there, as in many Roman cities, worshiped a variety of gods. The pagan practices and strong cultural influences obviously presented Christians there with tremendous challenges, not only in evangelizing the city but also just remaining faithful to the pure faith of the gospel. Another prominent Christian in Colossae was Philemon, who may have been converted about the same time as Epaphras.

**Read Philemon 15, 16. See also Colossians 4:9. What course did Paul gently urge Philemon to pursue with Onesimus?**

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Although Roman law required Paul to return Onesimus to Philemon, Paul appeals to Philemon's heart and conscience as a fellow believer and urges him to treat Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother *(Philem. 16)*.

**However much we detest the idea of slavery in any form, and wish that Paul would have condemned the practice, how do we come to terms with what Paul says here? (How fascinating that, during slavery in the United States, Ellen G. White specifically told Adventists to defy the law that ordered people to return escaped slaves.)**

# The Churches of Philippi and Colossae

**Read Philippians 1:1–3 and Colossians 1:1, 2. How are the churches in Philippi and Colossae described, and what significance does the depiction have?**

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Paul's typical greeting in his epistles calls Christians in those places "saints"; that is, through baptism they have been set apart as God's special people, just as the people of Israel, through the practice of circumcision *(Exod. 19:5, 6; compare 1 Pet. 2:9, 10)*, had been set apart as a "holy nation." (This has utterly nothing to do with the Roman church's practice of canonizing people as "saints.")

Also interesting is the parallel between the greetings of these two epistles. Paul refers to "overseers and deacons" *(Phil. 1:1, ESV)* in Philippi and "faithful brothers in Christ" *(Col. 1:2, ESV)* in Colossae. When the New Testament speaks of "faithful brothers," they have a specific ministry in the church *(see Eph. 6:21, Col. 4:7, 1 Pet. 5:12)*. So, it appears Paul is addressing not only the church members but also the church leaders in these cities. The reference to offices that are more specifically described in other places *(for example, in 1 Tim. 3:1–12, Titus 1:5–9)* witnesses to the existence and importance of organization from the earliest period of the church.

Training coworkers such as Timothy and Epaphras and providing for the leadership of local churches was a priority for Paul and augmented his evangelistic efforts. In other words, there was a strategic approach to both outreach and retention. Our Adventist pioneers followed the New Testament model of church organization, as many *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* articles from the 1850s show. In fact, James White said, "The divine order of the New Testament is sufficient to organize the church of Christ. If more were needed, it would have been given by inspiration."—"Gospel Order," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Dec. 6, 1853, p. 173. Long before Paul wrote to these churches, the apostles had already begun installing officers for the church in Jerusalem *(see Acts 6:1–6, Acts 11:30),* which "was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 91.

It is well known that Paul used literary assistants at times in the composition of his epistles. Timothy is also named as a co-sender elsewhere *(see, for example, 2 Cor. 1:1, Philemon 1)*. The fact that Paul goes on to use "I" rather than "we" shows that his authority stands behind these epistles also.

***(page 10 of Standard Edition)***

**Further Thought:** "God has chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth. Therefore stand fast. . . . If you serve God faithfully, you will meet with prejudice and opposition; but do not become provoked when you suffer wrongfully. Do not retaliate. Hold fast your integrity in Jesus Christ. Set your face as a flint heavenward. Let others speak their own words, and pursue their own course of action; it is for you to press on in the meekness and lowliness of Christ. Do your work with steadfast purpose, with purity of heart, with all your might and strength, leaning on the arm of God. The true and exalted nature of your work you may never know. The value of your being you can measure only by the life given to save you. . . .

"For every soul who is growing up into Christ there will be times of earnest and long-continued struggle; for the powers of darkness are determined to oppose the way of advance. But when we look to the cross of Christ for grace, we cannot fail. The promise of the Redeemer is, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' 'I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' "—Ellen G. White, in *The Youth's Instructor*, Nov. 9, 1899.

## Discussion Questions:

**❶ Paul was imprisoned several times, always unjustly. How do you respond when you are unfairly treated? What Bible promises can you suggest for such times?**

**❷ Of the persecution of Christians, Tertullian, an early church leader, said, "The oftener we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed."**—Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 3, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), p. 55. **At the same time, persecution in some places and times has greatly hindered the work of the church. What are ways that we can support those who suffer persecution for their faith?**

**❸ Think about the memory text for this week in light of the hardships Paul suffered. "Rejoice always." What does that mean? How are we supposed to do that? Someone you love is sick or dies. You lose your job. You are in great physical pain. Perhaps the key to understanding this is to ask, "Rejoice always in what?" That is, no matter our situation, what can we always rejoice in?**

INSIDE *Story*

# Investing in Thirteenth Sabbath

*By* Vania Chew

An Australian woman took a second look at Thirteenth Sabbath mission projects when her church encouraged members to give more than whatever they had in their pockets on the last Sabbath of each quarter.

Marilene Stevenson remembered a time when church members baked cakes and grew vegetables and sold them to raise money for Sabbath School investment projects. She wondered if she could do something similar and give the money to the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering.

Marilene didn't have the time, or inclination, to bake cakes and grow vegetables. However, she had started using a throat spray that she found helpful and had been recommending to others. When other people expressed interest in the spray, Marilene came up with the idea of buying it wholesale and reselling it. Any profit would go directly to the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering.

That first investment in throat spray spurred Marilene to seek more ways to raise money for mission.

"It really began with me buying stuff that I wanted," she said. "But it turns out that the things that I like to buy are the things that other people want to buy, too; they just don't have the time to go and buy them!"

Working with local farms and factories, Marilene was able to purchase healthy products at wholesale cost and sell them to family and friends at a cheaper rate than retail. She has sold exotic fruits, fresh tofu, and specialty vegan items over the years. She also has made floral arrangements and sold them for special occasions such as Mother's Day.

"It gives me a real buzz," she said. "I'm helping the people who I am selling to and, at the same time, raising money for a good cause."

Since she began investing, Marilene has raised 300 to 600 Australian dollars (US$200 to $400) each quarter for Thirteenth Sabbath mission projects.

She encourages all church members to give generously to Thirteenth Sabbath projects, even if it requires an investment to give a little more.



"I hope that it will inspire others to do something more than just a token offering like I was doing," she said. "God has truly blessed me with firsthand experience of His great faithfulness. How can I not want to share that?"

*This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath mission projects are in the South Pacific Division, whose territory includes Marilene's home country of Australia. Thank you for planning a generous offering on March 28.*



**Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.**

# Part I: Overview

**Key Text:** *Philippians 4:4*

**Study Focus:** *Rom. 8:12–39*

Paul faced many trials and tribulations while spreading God's message of salvation. Aside from Jesus, few have endured as much suffering as Paul did for the sake of the gospel. His list of hardships deserves our careful consideration and reflection. These hardships include, but are not limited to, tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, hunger, thirst, nakedness, the sword, beatings, homelessness, insults, slander, perplexities, privation, stripes, tumults, travail, sleeplessness, fastings, chastenings, pain, poverty, humiliation, stonings, shipwrecks, frequent journeys, life-threatening situations in various forms—whether from rivers, from robbers (both from among his own people and the Gentiles), or in the city, in the wilderness, at sea, and so on. Paul's sufferings also come from his dealing with infirmities and weaknesses, along with the challenge of taking care of the churches. Obviously, his imprisonments cannot be ignored, either *(compare with Rom. 8:35; 1 Cor. 4:11–13; 2 Cor. 4:8, 9; 2 Cor. 6:4, 5, 9, 10; 2 Cor. 11:23–29; 2 Cor. 12:10; Eph. 4:1)*. Paul's life was far from easy!

One must take a deep breath to recite the entire preceding list without a pause. Not infrequently, many of us find ourselves discouraged about far less. Nevertheless, if Paul's list of sufferings is impressive, his unwavering confidence is even more astonishing. He says, "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" *(Rom. 8:37, NKJV)*.

This week's lesson emphasizes two major themes:

1. Paul's sufferings for the sake of the gospel, most particularly his imprisonments.
2. Paul's strategies for preaching the gospel as effectively as possible, even under the most challenging circumstances.

# Part II: Commentary

**Illustration**

G. Curtis Jones recounts a tale about medical missionary Wilfred Grenfell (1865–1940). When asked why he committed himself so wholeheartedly to Christian missions, Grenfell responded with the following story:

"Into a hospital where I was a resident physician, a woman was brought one night terribly burned. . . . Her husband had come home drunk and had thrown a paraffin lamp over her. The police were summoned and at last

they brought in the half-sobered husband. The magistrate leaned over the bed and insisted that the patient tell the police exactly what happened. He impressed upon her the importance of telling the whole truth as she only had a little while to live.

"The poor soul turned her face from side to side, avoiding facing her husband, who stood at the foot of the bed. Finally her eyes rested on his strong hands, following them up his arms and shoulders and then across to his face. Their eyes met. Her expression of suffering momentarily disappeared, as tenderness and love colored her countenance. She looked at the magistrate and calmly said, 'Sir, it was just an accident,' and fell back on her pillow, dead. Grenfell added, 'This was like God, and God is like that. His love sees through our sins.' "—Jones, *1000 Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1986), p. 55.

Curtis Jones describes this kind of love as a "suffering love." Whether or not one agrees with what the woman did, and a very strong case could be made that she did wrong, still the point is powerful. Much like the love demonstrated by the woman in Grenfell's story, Paul's love also embraced suffering.

**Suffering Love**

In Romans 8:35, Paul expresses his deep assurance of Christ's love for him—and for all of us—through a rhetorical question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" The expected answer is a resounding "No one!" If God "did not spare His own Son" *(Rom. 8:32, NKJV)*, why would any hardship be able to separate us from the love of Christ? God proved His love by giving us His only Son, and with Him all things *(Rom. 8:32)*. Paul did not need further evidence of God's love. Neither do we.

Paul is so confident in God's love that he mentions it repeatedly *(Rom. 8:37, 39)*. Because of love, Jesus willingly endured suffering and death for us *(John 13:1, 34; John 15:9, 12)*. In turn, Paul was willing to endure suffering and death for Him. As a matter of fact, only the love of Christ for us can sustain our faith in times of trial.

In Romans 8:35, Paul catalogs his hardships in a sevenfold list: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. Perhaps, this series of seven trials suggests completeness in the sense that it represents the totality of all the hardships Paul endured. As previously noted, Paul's list of sufferings is much more extensive than this catalog. Up to this point, he had endured all the tribulations in this passage except for the seventh element, the sword. The sword would become his last trial, and he faced it with remarkable courage. His unwavering assurance in Christ enabled him to confront death with inner peace. At the moment of his death, Paul "was looking into the great beyond, not with uncertainty

or in dread, but with joyful hope and longing expectation. As he stood at the place of martyrdom he saw not the gleaming sword of the executioner or the green earth so soon to receive his blood; he looked up through the calm blue heaven of that summer's day to the throne of the Eternal. His language was, O Lord, Thou art my comfort and my portion. When shall I embrace Thee? When shall I behold Thee for myself, without a dimming veil between?"—Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 317, 318.

Paul was confident that if we share in Jesus' sufferings, we will also "be glorified with Him" *(Rom. 8:17, NASB)*. He fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. He knew a crown of righteousness would be given to him at the resurrection, when Christ returns *(see 1 Cor. 15:51–55; 2 Tim 4:7, 8).*

**Paul's Strategies for Preaching the Gospel**

Given the arduous circumstances under which Paul preached the gospel, he needed to employ wise strategies to ensure the success of his work.

First, Paul intentionally selected important cities of the ancient world from which he could more easily spread the gospel message. Thus, for instance, Corinth was chosen for its privileged geographic location. "An opportunity was thus presented for the spread of the gospel. Once established at Corinth, it would be readily communicated to all parts of the world."—Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 99. Paul also focused on Philippi because it was one of "the most influential urban centers on his route. . . . Its strategic significance in the history of the empire made it a natural evangelistic step for one being prepared to reach Rome."—Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), pp. 2380, 2381. Likewise, Ephesus was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, boasting a population of approximately 250,000 people in Paul's time.

Second, Paul invested time in training people for evangelistic ministry. Indeed, he "made it a part of his work to educate young men for the gospel ministry. He took them with him on his missionary journeys, and thus they gained an experience that later enabled them to fill positions of responsibility. When separated from them, he still kept in touch with their work, and his letters to Timothy and Titus are an evidence of how deep was his desire for their success."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 102. As far as Timothy is concerned, Paul took him to be not only his coworker but also a coauthor *(see 2 Cor. 1:1, Phil. 1:1, Col. 1:1, 1 Thess. 1:1, 2 Thess. 1:1, and Philem. 1:1)*.

Third, Paul followed the "to-the-Jew-first" approach *(Acts 13:46, Rom. 1:16)* as Jesus explicitly commanded *(Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; Acts 3:25, 26)*. This approach explains why Paul began his missionary endeavors in a

new city at the synagogue *(Acts 9:20; Acts 13:5, 14, 46; Acts 14:1; Acts 17:1, 2, 17; Acts 18:4)*. Reflecting on the instruction that the disciples' work should start in Jerusalem, Ellen G. White says, "Wherever the people of God are placed, in the crowded cities, in the villages, or among the country by-ways, there is a home mission field. . . . First of all is the work in the family; next they should seek to win their neighbors to Christ, and to bring before them the great truths of this time."—*Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 22, 1888.

Fourth, Paul maintained regular communication with the churches by sending letters to them. Because of his "deep concern for all the churches" *(2 Cor. 11:28, NKJV)*, he often couldn't remain long with the new converts in the cities where he preached. Thus, he utilized letters as a means of keeping in touch with the churches and providing instructions to them. The letters also served as a way of filling the void caused by his physical absence *(1 Cor. 5:3, Phil. 2:12)*.

## *Part III: Life Application*

Meditate upon the following themes. Then ask your students to answer the following questions.

Preaching the gospel can be challenging for many Christians, especially when societal norms conflict with the Word of God. Across the centuries, countless people have faced suffering, and even death, in the fulfillment of their missionary work. This reality was true in the early days of the Christian mission, and it will be no different at its conclusion *(Rev. 14:13)*. As we continue in missionary work and endure the sufferings that attend it, there is only one force that can sustain us: the love of Christ.

Most Christians realize the risks involved in following Christ, but we also must understand the paramount importance of fulfilling the commission, " 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations' " *(Matt. 28:19, NKJV)*. The task is arduous, but we trust in God's guidance every step of the way. Though it may become life-threatening in various forms, the task is rewarding. Jesus says, " 'Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life' " *(Rev. 2:10, NKJV)*.

In his missionary work, Paul employed various strategies to ensure its effectiveness: (1) He selected important cities as supporting outposts from which he could more easily spread the gospel message. (2) He invested time in training others. (3) He prioritized reaching those closest to him first. (4) He constantly kept in touch with those to whom he ministered. We should inte-

grate all these strategies into our own missionary endeavors. Paul knew, however, that although strategies are important, they can never replace the role of the Holy Spirit *(1 Cor. 12:1–11, Eph. 4:1–6)*. We must never forget this vital point.

**Questions:**

1. **What are some of the challenges that you have faced in preaching the gospel?**

2. **How have you employed Paul's four missionary strategies previously listed, and what were the results?**

## *Notes*