

**Pastor Jeff Williams**  
**June 9, 2002**  
**Stuck in Spearfish**

Let's open our Bibles up to the book of Philippians, Chapter 1. It's good to be back with you today. I missed all of you; I hope you missed me. This morning, I had to shave and cut my hair and put on a suit. I went downstairs and Brenda says, "Oh vacationworld is over, isn't it?" We had fun.

I want to relate a little story we are talking about this morning, probably one of the most unusual sermon titles I've had in a long time. In fact the program team made fun of it when they heard of it, but the message this morning is titled Stuck in Spearfish, which has no meaning to you at this point in time, but I think it will by the time we're done.

These past couple weeks we went on vacation out West. We went to Yellowstone. That was our big event. We were going to go to Yellowstone, and then we were going to go to the Titans. So we loaded up the car, and we headed out West. We drove the whole way. We were sort of in a hurry to get there to see the sites and thought we could take our time on the way home, but we wanted to make sure to get there because we had a long way to go. We were in Wall, South Dakota, near the Badlands, and we were getting ready to go to church and had time to kill after breakfast, so we left Wall Drug and went to the Badlands National Park and started to take a little tour again. We'd been there about five years ago, and since Lindsey hadn't seen it, we decided we'd go through there again. Well, we had car problems; the car broke down. We were towed into Wall, South Dakota. As good fortune would have it, there was a service station open. They fixed the problem, and we thought, "Isn't that great? They're open on a Sunday." We'd missed church, but we'd be able to get going on our trip.

So, we go into Wyoming. I said, "We're in Wyoming!" Everyone cheers and claps because that's the state of our destination. Of course, we have a little tradition in our family. I'll drive till I'm near exhaustion. For instance, last time we went to South Dakota, I drove all the way through the night so the family could get there. So it was 6 AM, and I'm finally just losing it. I wake up Brenda, and I said, "We're almost to Wall, South Dakota, and I can't drive anymore."

So she gets behind the wheel, and she drives 20 minutes and says, "We're there kids! We're in South Dakota!"

Everybody wakes up and says, "YEAH! YEAH MOM!!"

I am like, "But I drove all night!" She did that in Florida too.

The last vacation, I drove eight hours and thought, "I can't take it anymore." She drives for about a half hour, "We're in Florida kids!"

"YEAH!" Same thing happens over and over again.

"We're in Wisconsin kids! I drove us here!"

So I was bound and determined that this time I was going to get the glory. I'm going to be the one who crosses the line and gives the big announcement that we're in Wyoming. And I did! And we weren't far in Wyoming when the car broke down a second time. Same problem. Out in the West, in No Man's Land, I got out the little cell phone I use twice a year, and called AAA, "We need a tow." Guess where we were going back to? South Dakota. The place we'd just come from.

We got in the tow truck, and they took us back. They said, “We’re going to have to bring you to Spearfish. They’ve got a dealership there that does excellent work, and they’ll have you up and going.

We don’t want to go to Spearfish. We want to go to Jellystone and see Yogi Bear and have fun, Old Faithful. We don’t want to be in Spearfish, South Dakota. I know it’s a nice town. It’s famous for the play, Passions, if any of you have ever seen that. But that’s not where we want to be. That’s not our destination. We get there, and they’re not open on Sundays, so we’re going to be here. So I break the news to the family. We’re here tonight, and we’ve had good luck on vacations, but this time things didn’t work so well. Our car’s in a good place where it can get fixed. We have a nice hotel to stay at, and we’re safe. Tomorrow, we’ll take off in the morning, and we’ll head to Yellowstone. So we had fun that night. The next morning, I was there before they opened. They diagnosed the problem. They said, “We’ll have you going by noon.” Before noon came around, they said, “We’ve got to go out to get your part. We’re going to have your car pretty much all day. We’ll try to get it done before five, before you leave.” But we’re stuck in Spearfish.

So I go back to the hotel across the street, they’re expecting we’re going to get going. Their suitcases are packed, they’re ready to go, and I break the news. I say, “We’re *here*. We’re not going to go anywhere.”

Have you ever been stuck in Spearfish before? Usually when you go to Spearfish, you’re getting towed. You’re sort of going backwards because you don’t want to go. Spearfish represents that place in our lives of delay, that place of detour. It’s not our destination, it’s not where we want to be, and now kind of kicking and screaming against our will, we’re going back to someplace we don’t want to be. We’re stuck there, and we feel very hopeless and very powerless because we’re in this situation. For the time being, we know this is where we’re going to be, and we don’t like it. We’re mad about it; we’re depressed about it; we’re angry about it; we wish things were different. We know someday they will be, but right now, we are stuck in Spearfish. Anybody ever been there? Sure. If you didn’t raise your hand that you’ve been there, you’re going to be there one of these days. You’re going to take a little trip to Spearfish. You’re going to have a detour. You’re going to have a setback. You’re going to be in a place you don’t want to be. How do you cope with that? How do you handle it? Because it’s really easy to get negative in those situations. It’s really easy to just lose your religion and get mad at God or blame other people. It’s really easy sometimes there to have despair and give up and pitch a tent in Spearfish, make that your home. That’s a temptation.

We’re going to be talking from God’s word what to do when you and I are stuck in the Spearfish of our lives, when we experience those setbacks-those delays or detours.

In the Book of Philippians, the first chapter, Paul has a “Stuck-in-Spearfish” experience. He’s preaching the Gospel. He’s dynamically seeing people come to Christ. God is using his life, and there’s these trumped up charges that end up winding him in jail and end up having him in Rome to possibly be executed for his faith.

Now Paul, he doesn’t want to be in jail. Paul doesn’t say, “Whoopee! I’m in jail!”

We’re not talking about us saying “Oh, we love this Spearfish experience!” when we don’t. It’s not where we want to be.

But Paul is going to do things; he’s going to work some principles that you and I can glean a lot from that will help us in our walk. So Pastor Sean read the scripture. Paul is in

jail. His response to his circumstances are amazing. He's chained, right? The Gospel is not going forward, right? Well, right, he's changed. He's changed, that's true; he's in jail, that's true. But, the opposite is true of the reality of the Gospel.

So Paul's in prison, and the first thing Paul realizes is that Paul has a choice of how he responds to the circumstance. You and I, when we are stuck in Spearfish, we need to realize we have a choice. We didn't have a choice in our car breaking down. We didn't have a choice where we were going to go once the towers said they were going to tow us because we didn't know the area. But we have a choice once we're there how we're going to respond to it. Paul didn't have a choice to be in jail. But he had a choice how he was going to respond once he was there.

If you read your Bibles, you don't see Paul going, "I tell you! I'm going to break out of this joint! When I'm set free, I'm done with the Gospel. I'm done with God. If this is what it means to be a Christian, I'm done." You don't see that. You don't see Paul in denial either. We're not talking about denial. We don't see Paul saying, "I'm not in jail. It's not that bad. Jail's a nice place." He says, "I'm in chains."

What you do see is Paul making a choice.

We have choices when we're stuck in Spearfish.

I brought the news to my family, and I said that second day, "Well, we're not going to be going to Yellowstone today. In fact, we will try to, but it's going to be tonight at the earliest." Everybody was all disappointed with their suitcases packed and ready to go. I said, "But you know what? We're going to have fun today in Spearfish. It's a beautiful day today. It really is, and we're going to go for a walk. We're going to go for a nice long walk. There's a little brook over here we're going to walk by. We're going to go sightseeing and see what's in Spearfish today." So that's what we did.

During our time there, we had great fun in a Chinese restaurant with a psycho waitress. She was really, really nice; she was sickening sweet to us. We were the only customers there. "You want this egg roll? You want this? You want that? I'll get that for you." She was really nice, and then she'd go in the kitchen and just yell at her husband, cuss him out in Chinese. We were entertained by that.

We went on a long walk down this little brook to a fish hatchery with a growing trout. We fed the fish, and we went into this little tunnel that had big glass walls where the fish were swimming all around you. You got up right next to them. We walked, I'd say, about ten miles on that beautiful day. We just had a blast, a lot of experiences. We went bowling and did a lot of fun things that day. I said, "We're here. It's not where we want to be, but we'll get there."

There were a couple comments, "This vacation's been terrible." "Let's go home."

I said, "We've had our share of problems, but we're safe, it's a beautiful day, we're going to have fun, and we will get to Yellowstone. I promise you. We *will* get there."

I read a story about this 92-year old woman. It says, "A 92-year old petite well-poised, proud mother-in-law of my best friend was fully dressed each morning by 8 o'clock with her hair fashionably groomed and makeup perfectly applied. Even though she is legally blind, she moved into her nursing home today. Her husband of 70 years recently passed away, making the move necessary. Marie Jones is a lovely, gracious, most dignified woman that I've ever met. While I've never aspired to attain her depth of wisdom, I do pray that I will learn from her vast experiences. After many hours of waiting patiently in the lobby of the nursing home, she smiled sweetly when she was told her room was

ready. As she maneuvered her walker to the elevator, I provided a visual description of her tiny room, including the eyelet sheets that had hung on her window. 'I love it!' she stated with the enthusiasm of an eight-year old having just been presented a new puppy. 'Ms. Jones, you haven't seen the room.'

'That doesn't have *anything* to do with it!' she replied. 'Happiness is something you decide ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged. It's how I arrange my mind, and I've already decided to love it! It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice. I can spend the day in bed, recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or I can get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes are open, I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away just for this time in my life.'"

Good for her! She's in a nursing home, and for her it's not just a Spearfish. It's not just a temporary setback. That's going to be her home where she'll live till she dies. But she had a choice in how she was going to view that experience.

Paul has a choice. How does he view this experience? Is it "Oh, this is a loss of my freedom! This is the end of my ministry! This is a terrible tragedy that befell me!"

No, he doesn't view it that way.

Look what he says. He says in Verse 12, "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel." This word "advance" is a very interesting verb in the Greek. It's a military word that means somebody cutting down in advance. It's the word that would be used if an army was going to advance. In those days, they had some roads, but not like we have today, so you'd have to clear a path. Those words used here mean to clear a path for an advancing army. It means to cut down, to take away, to remove barriers is what this word means. This is incredibly significant because the church and Paul's friends are thinking this is a barrier to the Gospel, and Paul is saying, "No! This is advancement for the Gospel!"

"What do you mean Paul? You're in jail! How in the world can this be advancement for the army of God pertaining to the Gospel?"

Paul says, "I'm glad you asked. I'll tell you how it is." He says (Verse 13), "As a result, it has become clear through out the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."

A few things: Paul says number one, "I'm in chains." Now that means something significant. Everyday, Paul is chained to a different guard. In fact, they have shifts, so another guard comes in and is chained to him. They aren't going anywhere.

Paul says, "What an opportunity to share my faith." So people come to visit Paul because he's there for awhile. He shares Christ with his friends, and the jailers listen. Another jailer then comes on, and he hears Paul's testimony. And another jailer comes on, and pretty soon, the Gospel begins to spread throughout the Praetorian Guard. It's the elite fighting men of Rome. That's who he's held captive by. So the Gospel begins to spread through Caesar's Palace. Paul says, "Isn't this incredible! I've got a chained audience. They can't go anywhere. They *have* to listen." And Paul would preach the Gospel to the guards that were chained to him, and they would begin to come to Christ. The Gospel began to spread in Rome as a result of his imprisonment in a way it never would have.

Some of those men would have never come to hear Paul preach, but no they had no choice, and Paul preached.

Paul says, "What an opportunity I have as a preacher." So for all the time he was there, guard after guard after guard after guard would hear the Gospel and go home and share with their friends and their families, and revival began to take place in Rome.

Paul says another thing that's happened. He says, "People know now that the big gun is down, they're going to have to step up." He says, "Other people have been timid and shy. Now they're preaching the Gospel courageously." They're thinking, "Ok, since Paul's in prison, now I have to step up my game. I have to intensify my game. I have to intensify my ministry."

He says, "All around, I hear reports that people are saying, 'Okay, Brother Paul's down.'" It's like when a team loses somebody really important. They lose the go-to guy, the star. So everyone agrees with the coach, since the star's hurt, everyone needs to raise their game to another level. Players raise their game to another level. They step up. Paul says, "That's what's happening."

Paul says a third thing, "Worst case scenario: They kill me: I'm going to Heaven to be with Jesus. So bring on the rain! Whatever happens, bring it on!" Paul basically says, "If they kill me, they kill me. I'll just go to be with the Lord. If I stay here, it's fruitful ministry. I'll be able to help you and serve you. Either way is good. If I go to be with the Lord, that's the best. But if I stay to be with you, that's fantastic too. I love you guys! We'll be able to minister together. It'll be like old times. It's a no-lose situation for me. So whatever happens, bring it on!"

So what is it for you? We took a raise of hands. Some of you might be in Spearfish right now. It's not your destination; it's not where you want to be, but you're kind of there. You don't necessarily like it, but what's going to be your attitude there? Is it going to be, "This stinks! This isn't right! This isn't fair!" Or are you going to say, "You know what? This could be an opportunity in my life for growth. This could be an opportunity in my life for God to teach me."

Are you going to sing gloom and despair and agony to me, all two verses over and over again? Is that going to be you? It's easy to do, isn't it? "Gloom, despair, and agony on me. Agghh! If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all!" Some people sing that. They sing it over and over again until they start to believe it. "Nothing good ever happens to me here in Spearfish. I'll ever get out."

Or, are would you be able to say, "By the Grace of God, in the midst of this situation that I didn't plan, that I got towed to, bring on the rain. Whatever is coming my way, God is going to be with me. He's going to teach me through this, and I'm going to look not at the barriers, but I'm going to look at the opportunities that exist because they're there." You have to see them-they're there.

The second thing that Paul did was look clearly to the future. "Here's my present situation." But he also looked to the future.

Let's look at Verse 19 together. Let's start with the very end of Verse 18, where it says "yes." "Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance." Deliverance here means "I'm going to get out of jail." He's going to go on to say in Verse 24, "But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain," In other words, I'm not sure what's going

to happen, but I'm pretty sure because my work's not finished. I'm going to remain here on earth. That's what he's saying. "...and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith..."

So he's saying, "I'm looking towards the future. I know God has a future for me. I don't think this is my time to go. I think there's still work for me to do." So Paul began to look to the future, and that's really important. It's really important in those Spearfish experiences in our life that we don't pitch a tent and say, "Well, I guess this is me. I guess God doesn't want me to have that thing I thought he wanted me to. I guess this setback is now my home." Paul didn't want to accept jail as his future. He didn't just throw up his hands and go, "I'll just stay in jail forever. I'm praying for my deliverance while I'm here. While I'm stuck, I'm going to make the best of it. I'm going to refuse to see it as a barrier, and I'm going to see it as a cause for advancement of the Gospel. But that doesn't mean I like jail. That doesn't mean I want to stay here."

I said to my family, "We're here. We're going to make the best of it. But this isn't our vacation. We are going to get to Yellowstone. I promise you that. We're going to have fun whether you like it or not. We're going to get there." And we did. I'll have more Yellowstone stories for you down the road because I have a few.

Paul says, "I'm not going to stay here. I'm seeing a time when I'm going to minister with you again. I'm seeing a time when the bars are going to open up, and I'm going to walk out." Do you see that? Do you see that in your ministry in your life?

Yesterday, I spent some time ministering to a friend that I've known since childhood, and he's been stuck in Spearfish for a long time. In fact, he's pitched a tent there. When you've had a buddy for a long time, you can say things and take the gloves off. So we went out to talk, and I said, "You're just too comfortable. You are just accepting that this is the way it's going to be for the rest of your life. So, what's the matter with you? What happened to the friend I used to know that would pursue goals? What happened to that guy? What makes you think that your future is going to be dismal?" His mother used to always call our house when I was a boy. Gladys was a nice person, but Gladys had a tendency-the character Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh was based upon Gladys, I'm pretty sure, because Gladys would call and say, "Heeellllloo."

And I'd say, "Hello Gladys. Good morning."

And she'd say, "Don't know what's so good about it."

I'd say, "Well, it's a nice day Gladys."

"Is Aggie there?"

"Yah, she's here."

"I'd like to talk to her, but she probably doesn't want to talk to me."

I kid you not, that's how she talked, monotone, deep-based voice. She had a really sad way "probably doesn't want to talk to me, don't have that many friends you know."

Her funeral was one of the most crowded funerals you'd ever want to see. "Don't have many friends you know" she'd say.

I hear Dave talking "Gladys." "Nothing ever goes right for me" he says. "That's just the kind of luck I have. That's the kind of breaks I get."

I said, "Dave, you make your own breaks. You have to get out of this circumstance. Don't stay in Spearfish."

Here's a story I want to share with you: This fellow by the name of Jerry, he had a tremendous, positive attitude. This one fellow wanted to hear why he was always so

positive, so he got next to him. He managed a restaurant. Seeing his style made me curious, so one day I went up to Jerry and asked him, "I don't get it. You can't be a positive person all the time. How do you do it?"

Jerry replied, "Each morning, I wake up and say to myself, 'Jerry, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood, or you can choose to be in a bad mood.' I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something happens, I can choose to be a victim, or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it."

He went on to say, "Every time someone comes up to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining, or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side." Years later, he left the back door of his restaurant ajar. Some thieves came in, robbed him, and shot him. He went through 18 hours of extensive surgery and almost died. So he gets back in touch with him after all these years, and he hears about what had happened. After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, Jerry was released from the hospital with fragments of the bullet still in his body. I saw Jerry about six months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he says, "If I was any better, I'd be twins. Wanna see my scar?" I declined to see his wounds, but I asked him what he'd gone through in his mind as the robbery took place.

"The first thing that went through my mind was that I should've locked the back door," he replied, realistic view of the circumstances. "Then as I lay on the floor, I remembered that I had two choices, I could choose to live, or I could choose to die. I chose to live."

"Weren't you scared?" I asked. "Did you lose consciousness?" I asked.

Jerry continued, "The paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine, but when they wheeled me into the ER, I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and the nurses. I really got scared. In their eyes, I read, 'He's a dead man.' I knew I needed to take action."

"Well, what did you do?" I asked.

"Well, there was a big, burly nurse shouting questions at me," Jerry said. "She asked me if I was allergic to anything. I said yes. The doctors stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, 'BULLETS!' Over their laughter, I told them 'I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead.'"

Jerry lived thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude.

Jerry saw his future. If you're going to be out of Spearfish, you can't give up your dream. You have to see the future. You might be in this setback, you might be taking this little detour and this delay, but don't pitch a tent there. Feel God has something better for you. You keep your eyes on that. Keep your eyes on God's vision for your life. You see the future.

I said to my pal, "You have to see the future. You have to get it back. You have to pursue those dreams once again. You don't want to be content to stay here."

I purposed a hypothetical question to my family as we gathered in the restaurant waiting to retrieve our car; it was fixed and we were picking it up in a few minutes, I asked each of them individually after recounting some of the things we'd done: bowling, the restaurants we'd eaten at-some of the funny stories that had happened there, the walk, the time at the trout farm, the playground we went to which had all kinds of fun things to do that we stayed at for hours where they had different contests and a lot of fun, and the fun we'd had at the hotel. I said, "Let me ask you a question. If you could trade this day, and say this day never happened; and the car didn't break down twice; and we got to go to

Yellowstone when we were supposed to; if we'd spent yesterday and today in Yellowstone; and we were going to get to go see the Titans, which we know we can't do; if nothing bad happened on this vacation; we got there smoothly, but the only catch is, this day never happened, we never got stuck in Spearfish, we never did any of the things we did on our walk, would you trade the day? Would you trade it? You won't be broke down. You won't have to get towed. You won't have to sit on the interstate waiting for a tow truck to come. We'll be able to get to our destination. Would you trade the day?" We went around the room. "No." They gave it some thought-everybody pondered it. "No, I wouldn't trade it."

Isn't that something? Here's this bad news, here's this setback, and now as we get ready to head out to Yellowstone, not a person in the world would trade their day in Spearfish. Not a person here.

I wonder if you ask Paul, you could say, "Paul, guess what? I want to propose a question for you. That question is, if you never went to jail, your ministry went forward; you didn't spend one day in chains; you didn't spend one day awaiting a possible death sentence; you didn't spend one day in a cell away from the outdoors; away from your friends, away from freedom; your Gospel went forward, the Gospel of Christ went forward; you didn't spend one day in jail, but, Paul, here's the catch, you never preached the Gospel to any of those guards. The catch is you never wrote those letters to the churches that helped so many other churches, like the letter of Philippians. The catch is because you went to jail, those other people that were preaching the Gospel never stepped up to the plate like they did. Paul, would you trade your time in the jail? Paul, would you choose not to be stuck in Spearfish?"

What do you think Paul's answer would be? He'd say, "I wouldn't trade it."

If you'd have told him that before he went in jail, he'd probably have thought you were crazy. If you'd have told me that when it first happened, I could have traded the whole day that I was going to spend in Spearfish and not go to Yellowstone, I would have said I'd do it in a second. If you can approach these Spearfish opportunities in your life with that kind of an attitude; choose how you're going to respond to it; choose whether it's a barrier or an opportunity, whether through this circumstance God can advance his cause through you; choose not to be content but keep a clear focus on the future to be what God's called you to be. If you can do that, you and I will look back at the Spearfish experiences of our lives, and we won't trade them. We won't *trade* them. If we take the other choice, if we choose to dwell on the negative and speak the negative, and see it as a barrier and see all the things we've lost instead of all the things that we've gained or all the things we have and all the things we've learned, choosing to dwell on the negative, not only will you not be able to look back and say "I wouldn't trade it," but you may never leave there. You may be buying real estate in Spearfish.

It's a nice town in the literal sense, but in the figurative sense, like we are talking, I don't think you want to live there. It's second best. Why live in Spearfish if God's called you to go to Yellowstone, one of the greatest wonders of the world? We have a choice to make. Paul had a choice to make. That 92-year old woman had a choice to make. Jerry the restaurant owner had a choice to make. Our family had a choice to make. Gloom, despair, and agony, or bring on the rain! I'm thirsty! There's a blessing here that God has for me, and I'm not going to stay here, but I'm going to learn, and I'm going to glean all that I can. Then I'm going to move on to what God has for me next.

Please stand with me for closing prayer today. If you'd bow your heads and close your eyes for a moment, I want to ask this question in a private moment. I didn't want to pose it during the message. How many of you would say that right now in your life, you're going through a Spearfish opportunity? You're just right where you don't want to be. Just put your hand up, let me see it. Hold it up, I want to see you, so I can remember to pray with you. I am going to pray for you this week. Thank you.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the example this morning of the Apostle Paul. We see a man who could have been angry and bitter over his circumstances, for the fact that he was stuck in a jail for a crime he did not commit. Instead, he sees it as an opportunity to advance the Gospel, and he does. He writes letters. He meets people he wouldn't normally meet, and he preaches the Gospel to men who normally would not hear it. Brothers begin to step up and preach the Gospel. What seemed like a dark time in Paul's ministry becomes a wonderful experience. We benefit today from the letters that were inspired by your Holy Spirit from that prison cell that we read in our Bibles. Paul wouldn't trade that day for anything. My prayer is especially for those this morning that raised their hands and said right now they are stuck in Spearfish: it's not their destination, it's not where they want to be, but right now, it's where they are, that they'll begin to look and say, "What are my opportunities? What can I learn? How can I advance the Gospel from where I'm at right now?" But they will also keep their eyes on what You called them to, that they will see the future, that they will make right choices, that You will see them through, that You will deliver them, even as You delivered Paul. I pray this today in Jesus' name. Amen.