

A LIFE LIVED IN FELLOWSHIP, PART 7

As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" (Acts 22:25, NIV)

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BELONG TO A PRIVATE COUNTRY CLUB to understand how membership works. At a private club, if I am a member, I have ready access to the locker room, dining room, grill, swimming pool, pro shop, and golf course. The sign out front sets the conditions: *Members only*.

But interestingly enough, even a member at the most exclusive club in the world would not be able to tee it up in a tournament of the men's club at your local muni unless he paid to join. Oh sure, the annual dues for that muni's club are peanuts compared to the monthly dues at a high-end facility, and there may be no limiting sign out front, but the rules are the same—unless you are a member, you don't have the same privileges as those who belong.

It's easy to think we set ourselves up for the privileges that come our way. Isn't it our money that pays the way? But as followers of Jesus, we must see our lives more circumspectly than that. Money comes from opportunity and opportunity almost always begins with a framework beyond our control, including upbringing, education, friendships, timing, and more. When we look at life this way, we begin to see all that is ours as a gift from God.

When, in today's accompanying video, Judge Tim Philpot says that he truly believes that God gave him golf as a gift, he is looking at life this way. More than that, he has asked himself the question, "Now what does God want me to do with this gift?" From there, he has made golf an arena of ministry for Jesus.

The apostle Paul was a Roman citizen. He was born so. He had no control over this fact, nor was he ashamed of it. Indeed, in one of the darkest hours of his life, when a Roman soldier lifted his hand to begin scourging Paul for no good reason other than to show him who was boss, Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship to escape the torture. He appealed to it again at court and found himself on the way to Rome, a place he had always longed to go. Then he used the gift of an all-expenses-paid trip to the capital to gain an audience with Caesar for the gospel of Christ.

What unique gifts has God given you? Are you using them for his service? If we are blessed to be a blessing, every gift is a chance to speak on behalf of our King.

Opening questions What are the advantages and disadvantages of membership? • Where has God given you access, and to what extent have you considered this an opportunity for ministry?

READING Colossians 4:3-6; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Open doors (Colossians 4)

What were Paul's circumstances when he wrote? What was his request? How did he transfer this same work to other disciples, such as you and me?

Fitting in (1 Corinthians 9)

You may not always be a "natural member" among those you are with. How should you work to reach them all the same? What is the dual motivation for gospel ministry (verse 23)?

Ministers of a spiritual nature (2 Corinthians 5)

If we don't regard people in a worldly fashion, how should we regard them? What does it mean to carry a message of reconciliation?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2017 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available at <https://youtu.be/2hlfyYIKWq8>.