

## Rethinking Your Purpose

### A Study of Philippians 1:12-26

Characteristic of Completeness: Jesus Christ

Big Idea: “To live is Christ; to die is gain.”

Related Scriptures: Matthew 16:25; 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 2 Corinthians 5:1-8; Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:16; 3:1-4; 3:23-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15

Introduction:

A. (Play video, “Purpose.” It should come on automatically as PowerPoint in opened.)

B. What drives you? What is your purpose in life? What is your reason for being?

The absence of a clear and compelling answer can produce the kind of angst and disillusionment represented by the guy in the video.

On the other hand, the presence of a clear and compelling life purpose can bring an abiding joy, even in the midst of hardship. We can endure a lot if we’re convinced it’s meaningful. It’s when things seem meaningless that we want to give up.

C. We have been studying through the Bible book of Philippians. It’s a letter written by the Apostle Paul to his friends and partners in the church in ancient Philippi. Somewhere along the line, the joy had leaked out of life for the Philippians, and they were about ready to give up. And so Paul writes them a letter, encouraging them to rethink some things because he knows that, when the joy and meaning leak out of life, the leak is between our ears.

The text we’re going to be studying today is Philippians 1:12-26. In this text, Paul encourages the Philippians to rethink their purpose. He does this in a very personal way. He does it by revealing his own purpose in life—a purpose so clear and so compelling and so big that it draws us in and challenges us to rethink our own purpose.

What drives you? What is your purpose in life? What is your reason for being?

D. Paul sums up his life purpose in powerful, pithy, poetic credo in ► Verse 21 of our text. He says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

If you’re like me, these words evoke a strange mix of inspiration and mystery. I sense the gravity of these words and I do feel challenged by them, but I’m not quite sure I completely understand what they mean.

Today, I want to talk about what Paul means. For the big idea of my message, I have ► simply borrowed Paul's words: To live is Christ; to die is gain. And the rest of my message comes in ► two parts. Initially, we'll unpack the statement, "to live is Christ." Then we'll follow with a study of the second part: "to die is gain."

I. First, what does Paul mean when he ► says, "to live is Christ."

A. I want to show you that, by this, Paul means that ► Christ is the center of his life. Christ is his cause. Christ is his reason for living. So, in Paul, we're going to see a model of our Characteristic of Completeness for the week, which ► is Jesus Christ. Paul's life purpose is summed up in Jesus Christ. Everything else takes a back seat. Everything else is peripheral. Paul views everything in his life according to its contribution to the cause of Christ.

1. We get our first glimpse of this in Verses 12-14, where Paul views his own hardship in light of its contribution to the cause of Christ.

You may recall that Paul is writing from prison in Rome in A.D. 61. He was arrested in A.D. 56 in Jerusalem for preaching Christ.<sup>1</sup> As a Roman citizen, Paul appealed to Caesar and was eventually transported to Rome to appear on trial before Caesar. So Paul has been under arrest for some five years. During this time, he had endured false accusations, scorn, death threats, neglect, a shipwreck, and a poisonous snake bite.<sup>2</sup>

If comfort or freedom or pleasure were at the center of his life, Paul would be devastated.

But he's not. He's not devastated because he sees all this through the lens of his life purpose. Through his imprisonment, many Roman guards have come to know Christ and many believers have been emboldened to take up the cause of Christ. That is at the forefront of his thinking. That is what he wants to talk about. Paul ► says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, ► 13 so that my imprisonment in *the cause of Christ* has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, ► 14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne House, *Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 127.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 21:15-28:30.

So we see that Christ is the center of Paul's life. ► Not comfort. Not freedom. Not pleasure.

2. Then, beginning in Verse 15, Paul puts another source of personal pain into perspective. He explains that some of the ones who have been emboldened to proclaim Christ have been speaking with wrong motives. It seems that they may have even been saying some hurtful things about Paul. In ► Verses 15-17, he says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; ► 16 the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ► 17 the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment.

It is interesting that Paul is calling to question not the theology but the motives of these preachers. Apparently, the preachers were not heretics; they were not false teachers.<sup>3</sup> They were merely selfishly ambitious.

We don't know exactly what was going on, but it's not hard to imagine. If Paul was the most famous ambassador of Christ in his day, and he is now out of commission in prison, then that would leave a perceived vacancy for others who selfishly aspire to be the top dog. And in the competition for the top spot, it's not hard to imagine candidates taking a few cheap shots—saying some things that would make themselves look good at Paul's expense.

Maybe it was something like our primary elections these days where candidates from the same party share a common platform, but take shots at each other in an effort to win the primary.

Some have speculated that perhaps some fellow preachers were critical of Paul's decision to appeal to Caesar and thus get himself in this predicament.<sup>4</sup> Maybe after delivering a perfectly orthodox sermon about Christ, these selfishly ambitious preachers slipped in a few political statements suggesting that they would be an even better top dog than Paul. That could certainly be a potential source of "distress" for Paul.

If popularity or reputation or prestige were at the center of his life, Paul would be devastated.

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<sup>3</sup> D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Carson, 22-23; cf. Acts 26.

But he's not. He's not devastated because he sees all this through the lens of his life purpose. If the same ambition that causes some to preach Christ also causes them to demean Paul, so be it. Paul's own reputation is not nearly as important to him as the cause of Christ. In ► Verse 18, Paul says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. . . .

This is remarkable. Paul *rejoices* in his own humiliation, if that means Christ is all the more exalted. Christ is the center of Paul's life. ► Not popularity. Not reputation. Not prestige.

3. In Verses 18-20, Paul goes on to explain that, whether he lives or dies is incidental. The main thing is for Christ to be evident in him through it all. He ► says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:18 . . . Yes, and I will rejoice, ► 19 for I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ► 20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

If longevity or health were at the center of Paul's life, then the threat of an imminent trial and torture or execution would have been devastating.

But Paul is not devastated because Christ is the center of his life. ► Not longevity. Not health.

4. Then Paul explains that the only reason he remains on earth is to do the work of Christ. In ► Verse 22 he says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:22 But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me . . .

Notice it's not just any labor; it's ► "fruitful" labor. For many, fruitful labor means career advancement, enhanced socio-economic status, and a growing net worth. But not for Paul. In ► Verse 25, he reveals that the fruit he has in mind is helping others grow up in Christ. Paul says he labors,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:25 . . . for your progress and joy in the faith

Christ is at the center of Paul's life. ► Not career ladder-climbing. Not socio-economic status. Not net worth.

5. And finally, Paul says that even his personal preferences are surrendered to his life purpose. Beginning in Verse 23, Paul confesses that, if it were all about him, he would personally prefer to die and go to heaven than to remain on earth. But his purpose involves other people, so he subordinates his own preference to the cause. He ► says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:23 But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; ► 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. ► 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, ► 26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

Christ is the center of Paul's life. ► Not preferences. Not happiness. Not self.

6. Paul seems like he's a little over the top with this whole Jesus thing. He's a little too much like a religious fanatic for me. If he were alive today, I don't think I'd want him as a friend; he'd probably be pushing me to do things that are way too radical. I'm not sure I want to be that much of a Jesus freak. And I'm probably not even supposed to be, because after all, Paul was an apostle; I'm not. And Paul was describing what he was, not what I'm supposed to be.

Right?

Maybe we need to rethink this. It all gets back to our purpose. How is your current purpose different that Paul's? What drives you? What is your purpose in life? What is your reason for being?

- a. There's a part of me that thinks Paul's purpose has too many "nots." Not comfort, not freedom, not pleasure, not popularity, not reputation, not prestige, not longevity, not health, not career ladder-climbing, not socio-economic status, not net worth, not preferences, not happiness, not self.

Can we not have the "nots?" No. As believers, Christ is to be the center of our lives, not just Paul's life. According to the Bible, we cannot not have the "nots." We can certainly enjoy these things, but they're not why we're here. We can have some fun, but that is not to be our focus.

If we look elsewhere in the Bible, we see that it is God's desire for every believer to embrace Paul's purpose: "For me, to live is Christ, and not any other thing."

In ► Colossians 1:16-18 we are told,

<sup>NAU</sup> Colossians 1:16 For by Him [that is, by Christ] all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—► all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 ► He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ► 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything [Emphasis mine].

Also in ► 1 Corinthians 10:31, we are told,

<sup>NAU</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God [Emphasis mine].

- b. The irony is that when I forget the “nots,” allowing Christ to be pushed aside by any or all of these other purposes in my life, I’m actually setting myself up for profound disappointment and disillusionment. The other purposes do not provide true joy. They can provide a temporary buzz, but not true joy. Joy is found in being who you were made to be and doing what you were designed to do. Chasing other things will eventually disappoint. That’s the point of ► Mark 8:35, where Jesus Himself looks us squarely in the eye and says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Mark 8:35 “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it.”

- B. “To ► live is Christ” means that Christ is the center of Paul’s life. But it means something else, too. It also means that ► Christ is the measure of his progress.
1. Paul is focused on progress toward his life purpose. In fact our text is a progress report. The word, ► “progress” appears in the first sentence, and the same Greek word for “progress” appears in the last sentence. This is a literary framing device known as an *inclusio*. The *inclusio* indicates that this entire section is all about progress.
  2. Paul measures progress in two ways. There are two kinds of growth he has in mind.
    - a. We see the first kind of progress in ► Verse 13, where Paul says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:13 . . . my imprisonment in *the cause of* Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else

The ► Praetorian Guard numbered some 9,000 Romans soldiers.<sup>5</sup> I don't think this means that all of them guarded Paul or that Paul spoke with all of them. I think it means that Paul shared the gospel with the rotation of guards who oversaw him. These guards must have, in turn, shared with other guards.

So it seems that Paul measures progress in terms of the number of people who hear and experience the good news about the love of Jesus Christ for them. That's the ► first kind of progress: reaching more people.

This is also reflected in ► Verse 14, when he says,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:14 . . . most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

Historically, persecution has emboldened believers to speak out. This is a good thing, according to Paul, because more people will hear about Christ. That's progress.

- b. There's also a second measure of progress. It is evident in ► Verse 20, where Paul says that it is his "earnest expectation and hope" that . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:20 . . . Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body

To be ► exalted means to be enlarged or magnified.<sup>6</sup> So Paul wants Christ to be enlarged or magnified in his body. He wants Christ to be evident in his person. That's another way of saying he wants to be more and more like Christ so that, when people see him, they see Christ. That's the ► second measure of progress: becoming more and more like Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians, Black's New Testament Commentary*, ed. Henry Chadwick, (London: A & C Black, 1998), 75; Carson, 23.

<sup>6</sup> W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. "μεγαλύνω," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

Paul strives to be Christ-like himself, and he works to encourage and to teach and to help other believers to be more and more Christ-like. That's progress. That's what he has in mind when he says in ► Verses 24 and 25,

<sup>NAU</sup> Philippians 1:24 . . . to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith [Emphasis mine]

Elsewhere, in ► Ephesians 4:13, Paul explains that a primary function of the church is to work together toward Christ-likeness . . .

<sup>NAU</sup> **Ephesians 4:13** until we all attain to . . . the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

When I was a teenager, I worked at my dad's gas station in Tucson. My dad's name is Jack. I remember one of the regular customers. His name was Arthur Lee. Mr. Lee would never call me by my first name, Bob. Instead, he would always call me "Little Jack." "Hey, 'Little Jack.'" "Fill 'er up, 'Little Jack.'" "Check the oil, 'Little Jack.'" He called me, "Little Jack" because I looked like my dad; I walked like my dad; I dressed like my dad.

In the same way, I am to be more and more like Jesus. I am to be a chip off the old Jesus block.

3. So Christ is Paul's measure of progress, and it involves ► reaching more people and becoming more Christ-like.

How do we apply this?

- a. Well, it seems like if the measure of our progress is Christ, then maybe we can evaluate our lives and significant decisions in our lives using two simple questions.
- (1) One: ► Are more and more people hearing and experiencing the love of Jesus Christ through me?
  - (2) And ► two: Am I becoming more and more like Jesus Christ and helping others do the same?
- b. Let ► me show you how this can work.

- (1) Some of you know that my wife, Cathy is going to graduate school and working full-time. One of her classes meets for four hours on Wednesday night. There's only four or five students in the class, so everybody is getting to know each other fairly well.

The professor is a single woman, and somehow Cathy picked up in conversation that her birthday was last week. On the way to class, Cathy was tired. She had worked all day, and now she was going to sit in class for hours.

Cathy remembered that it was the professor's birthday, and she sensed that maybe the professor was lonely and perhaps didn't have anyone to celebrate her birthday—Cathy has a special kind of radar for that sort of thing.

Cathy thought about getting the professor a birthday cake and some snacks for class. But she wrestled with herself over it. "Maybe this is silly." "It's just a class." "I'm so tired."

But Cathy's purpose in life is not just to get an education. It's not just to minimize her work when she's weary. Christ is the center of her life and the measure of her progress.

So Cathy got the cake and the snacks. In the school parking lot, she ran into the professor. Not with the car; I'm speaking figuratively.

Looking at the cake and stuff, the professor asked, "What's all this?"

Cathy said, "It's for you. Happy Birthday!"

What happened next was the real surprise. The professor began to cry. After a moment, she composed herself and said, "You have no idea what this means to me." And then, she looked at Cathy and asked, "Who are you?" It's not that the professor didn't recognize Cathy; she knew that Cathy was a student in her class. It was a deeper question: "Who are you?"

Cathy didn't know what to say. But I know the answer: She's "Little Jesus." A "Little Jesus" reaching out to another person with the love of Christ.

- (2) Measuring your progress according to these two questions can make a big difference. And it doesn't make you so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good. Quite the contrary. "Little Jesuses" redeem neighborhoods; they transform communities; they enhance workplaces; they make the world a better place.

I encourage you to look at your calendar, your to-do list, the way you spend your time, the way you spend your money, the house you live in, the car you drive, the clothes you wear—view them all through the lens of your purpose in life and see if you need to make some adjustments.

- II. "To ► live is Christ" means that Christ is to be the center of our lives and the measure of our progress. But what about when Paul says, ► "To die is gain"? What does that mean? There are a number of implications.
- A. First, it seems clear that Paul believes this life on earth is not all there is. Otherwise, there would be no gain in dying. There is a life after this one. ► Life on earth is merely preparatory.
- B. And not only is life on earth merely preparatory, but in fact, ► the best is yet to come.
1. In ► Verse 21, the Greek word for "gain" means profit.<sup>7</sup> As believers, our spiritual payday comes after we die. That is not to say that there are no personal, earthly benefits to being a Christian. There are. But the best is yet to come. Our rewards are largely deferred; they come after we die.
  2. That explains Paul's expressed ► "desire to depart" from this life on earth in Verse 23. He says to depart is ► "very much better."
  3. And in Verse 23 we also see why it is so much better. Paul says that he will then ► "be with Christ." Paul is talking about heaven.
- C. This really helps me put things into perspective. Let's rethink this. If, as a believer, pretty much all the good stuff comes after I die, what am I doing here? If for me, heaven was secured the moment I believed in Jesus Christ for eternal life, and if heaven is better in every way than earth, why am I still here? Why doesn't God just beam us all up the moment we believe? If to die is gain, why not cash in immediately?

Because we have a job to do first: Reaching more and more people and becoming more and more like Christ. To ► live is Christ; to die is gain.

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<sup>7</sup> BDAG, s.v. "κέρδος."