

Week 3: Living for Christ *Philippians 1:18-30*

Hook



Main Point: *We advance the Gospel by living for Christ in all that we do.*

Group Activity: In our lives, many things compete for our attention, time and money. Although we may have to change our priorities sometimes as our life circumstances change, according to Paul, Jesus and His mission should always be the top priority in our lives. This exercise will help our class members consider what their priorities really are.

Directions: Have everyone write down the 10 most important things in their lives, in no particular order. They don't have to rank them; it actually will work better if they don't. They can be things or people or activities (mountains, Mercedes, husband, golfing, etc.) They don't have to take a long time to think about it, just the first 10 things they think about will work. They can compare with friends sitting close by or not. After the list is done, instruct them to cross off the least important, leaving their top nine. Then take the least important of those, leaving them with eight. And so on until they are left with one item on their list. The experience of taking one item away at a time rather than having them rank them all at the beginning helps to get to the root of which is really most important to them.

Were some items on the list easy to cross off? Why or why not?

Which items were harder to cross off and why?

If Jesus was on that list, was it difficult to put Him at the top? Why?

Looking at the one thing you have left, what would your life look like if you centered it around that thing/person/activity?

If you were to fill in this blank, "For me, to live is _____," what would it be?

Week 3, Philippians 1:18-30

Book

Main Point: We advance the Gospel by living for Christ in all that we do.

Text Summary: Paul dives deep into his message to the Philippians, using his own life as an example. Jesus is the all-consuming and singular focus of Paul's life. So much so that he wishes he could just go ahead and die and go on to be with Him, but he is willing to stay on earth as long as he is needed for the mission. He encourages the Philippians to stand firm in unity in their mission, to live lives worthy of the Gospel, and to see their suffering as an opportunity to advance the Gospel.

BEFORE YOU READ: First, a word about this section as a whole:

No, it's not a typo that we are reading verse 18 again this week. If you remember, we included verse 18 as the last verse of last week's section. We have included it as the first verse in this section because Paul used verse 18 as a transition verse between the two sections. Look at the structure of verse 18. It's written out on two lines here for you to see the transition more easily (the ESV does the same, splitting verse 18 into two lines):

... Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice!

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that... (Philippians 1:18, 19a)

The word "rejoice" is used twice in a literary device the Greeks often used called a "tail-head construction." The two "rejoices" are back-to-back, or more accurately tail-to-head, connecting two different reasons Paul is rejoicing. This created a smooth transition from one idea to another.ⁱ

So last week's section and this week's section are linked. In last week's section, Paul talked about God's using his suffering for the advancement of the Gospel. By the end of this week's section, Paul will encourage the Philippians that their suffering will also be used for the advancement of the Gospel (Philippians 1:29-30). Paul even says they are engaged in the same conflict as he (v. 30). Their experiences are parallel, and he links them with the word "rejoice." If God is using Paul's suffering, He will use theirs. If Paul can rejoice in his sufferings, they can rejoice in theirs. Not just *endure* their sufferings, but actually *rejoice* in them (Romans 5:3; Colossians 1:24; James 1:2).

Paul rejoices in his sufferings not because he enjoys suffering, but because he knows his suffering is advancing the Gospel, his life's mission. The Philippians can find the same purpose and the same encouragement in theirs. This is the point of connection he is trying to get to by the end of the chapter. But on the way to that point, he walks through several other points.

Philippians 1:18-21 [Read]

Sub-Point 1: Whether he lives or dies, for Paul, it is all about Jesus.

In verse 21, Paul makes one of the boldest, most profound, most hard-core statements in all of Scripture as his conclusion to this short section. It's kind of like his thesis statement of the whole chapter. Really, of the whole book of Philippians. Really, of his whole life. *"For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21).

What do you think Paul means by that?

Why would death be gain for Paul?

How would your life be different if you lived by this philosophy?

Paul doesn't just make this statement out of the blue. He leads the Philippians to this statement through all that he has been saying about how God is using his suffering. In verses 18-19, Paul says he will rejoice because he is confident that through their prayers and the Holy Spirit, this will all turn out for his deliverance. There are several possibilities as to what he meant by his "deliverance," which can also be translated "vindication" or "salvation." He could be referring to his release from prison, vindication on earth in his release, vindication on Judgment Day, or the completion of his salvation after his death. Bible commentators generally agree that although he is hoping to be released from prison (1:25-26), he has the grander deliverance of his salvation in mind.ⁱⁱ Even if he isn't released from prison, this will end in his deliverance, because for him, death is deliverance.

Paul reminds the Philippians of prayer here again (v. 19). In last week's passage, he said he prayed for them. Now, he reminds them of the power of *their* prayers for *him*. Along with the Holy Spirit, their prayers will give him strength. He doesn't explicitly ask for their prayers. He doesn't have to ask. He "knows" they are praying for him (v. 19).ⁱⁱⁱ This is another way they are partners with him in the Gospel. Their prayers will sustain him in times of suffering. They will give him the strength to stand firm in times of persecution.

In life or in death, Paul will glorify Christ. Whether he is released from prison to do more ministry or whether he dies as a martyr, Christ will be proclaimed. He will “not be at all ashamed” (v. 20). No matter what they do to him, even to the point of death, he will not be ashamed of the Gospel:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. —Romans 1:16

Why is he not ashamed? Because he has confidence in the saving power of the Gospel. Because he has confidence in where he is going, he does not fear death. Paul will never deny Christ before men because he isn't afraid of anything man can do to him. Just as Jesus said to His disciples in the Gospels:

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell... So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. —Matthew 10:28, 32-33

Paul's boldness comes from his perspective. They can't hurt him; they can't threaten him because he doesn't fear death. Death would actually be a good thing for him. It would mean he gets to be with Jesus forever. Life after death will be his reward for finishing the race well (1 Corinthians 9:24; 2 Timothy 4:7-8). Being with Jesus is his heart's greatest desire. So, Paul can confidently say that death is gain for him. Because for him, his life is all about Christ. So, dying and going to be with Him would be even better.

For Paul, everything in his life was about Jesus. Everything he did, everywhere he went, everything he said, every dollar he spent, every friend he made. It was all about Jesus. His very *definition* of life was Christ (v. 21). For Paul, Life = Christ.

Have you ever heard people say, “Music is life” or “Traveling is life” or even “This cheesecake is life”? They mean that it's not just the best thing in their life, *it's what their life is all about*. What the rest of their life revolves around. That it brings them life, it makes them feel alive. Think about people you know who love music so much their lives revolve around it. They always have earphones in, they plan their schedules around concerts, the first thing they do when they get in the car is plug in their AUX cord; they obsess over the perfect playlists for parties. When they're hurting, they go to music for comfort. When they're happy, they play fun music. For that person, music is life.

This is how Jesus was for Paul. Jesus not only brings us life – eternal life in heaven and abundant life on earth, He *is* life. For Paul, Jesus was what his life was all about. What the rest of his life revolved around.

Too many of us compartmentalize Jesus. He’s just one part of our lives, maybe even the most important part of our lives. But Paul says Jesus *is* life. Think of it this way. Our life is like a dresser, with all of these different drawers. You have one drawer for work, one for family, one for hobbies—a drawer for each of those things you put on your list in the opening activity. Jesus isn’t just one drawer in the dresser. Jesus *is* the dresser, and all of the other drawers fit into Him.

If Jesus is life, not just part of our lives, we have a totally different perspective. It’s not just about putting our faith first; it’s about fitting everything else into our faith. So, with work, for example. It’s not just, “I need to make sure I don’t work on Sundays because I need to make it to church.” It’s “How can I glorify God with my work each and every day of the week?” The same with family and hobbies and so on, for every drawer in our lives. Jesus is not just one part of our lives. He *is* life.

If you really lived this philosophy, Jesus = Life, how would your life look differently?

If you really lived this philosophy, how might your community be changed?

What things compete for that center spot in your life?

What is your life centered around right now?

Why is it so difficult to keep Jesus at the center of our lives?

Does it seem like too much for Jesus to ask us to live our lives this way?

Philippians 1:22-26 [Read]

Sub-Point 2: Paul would have rather died and gone to be with Jesus, but he knew God still had work left for him to do on earth.

In this section, Paul uses the tail-head literary device again. The same phrase “to live” is used in verses 21 and 22.^{iv} These two sections are linked. The point Paul makes in this section can only

be understood because we understand the point of the previous section – that for Paul, to live is Christ and to die is gain. So, Paul will either die for Christ or live for Christ. To die would actually be preferable, because he would be with Jesus. But, if God wants him to continue to live, he will live for Christ.

The last half of verse 22 might sound confusing – “*which I shall choose I cannot tell*” (v. 22). Commentators agree that Paul isn’t saying he’s keeping his choice a secret, but that he isn’t sure what he would choose if God gave a choice. Because both options are good – both dying for Christ and living for Christ. Both going to be with Jesus and getting to still work here to advance the Gospel. He isn’t saying God is giving him a choice. This is a hypothetical to prove a point. Without Jesus, most people would always choose to live, if given the choice. But for a believer, it would be a much harder choice to make, because we actually look forward to life after death.^v

But Paul knows that even though he desires to be with Christ, God still has work for him to do on earth. Notice Paul’s two options aren’t “going to heaven to get his mansion in the sky” or “staying here to enjoy his life while he can.” For Paul, both options are about Jesus. Going to heaven is about being with Jesus and staying here is about working for Jesus.

In verse 24, Paul says that he needs to stay here for the sake of the Philippian believers – “*to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account*” (v. 24). He is convinced, for now, that God wants him to stay with them, for their “*progress and joy in the faith*” (v. 25). So, Paul’s mission is not just to make more and more new disciples, but also to develop deeper faith in established believers like the Philippians. Advancing the Gospel is both evangelism and discipleship. Paul’s imprisonment has served to advance the Gospel. So could his death and so could his life.

Paul uses the same Greek word here that he did in verse 12 for “advance,” and it is coupled with “joy,” which was his linking word between the sections (1:18).^{vi} Paul’s goal in life is not only to live for Christ Himself, but to advance the Gospel in the lives of others. This is what brings him ultimate joy. This is why he rejoices, either in prison or in death or in life. As he will say later in the same letter, either “in plenty or in hunger, abundance and need” (Philippians 4:12-13). In every situation, Paul will rejoice. Because God can use every situation to advance the Gospel.

As believers, we are not just biding time until we get to heaven to be with Jesus. We are not called to live our lives only for ourselves. Not just for our own pleasure, or even just for our own spiritual growth, though that is important, too. We are here on mission. To bring more people

into the kingdom and to advance spiritual growth in the lives of others. To advance the Gospel by living for Christ.

What “fruitful labor” does God have for you to do?

How can you advance the Gospel in the world in general, bring people to know Jesus for the first time (evangelism)?

How can you advance the Gospel in the lives of established believers (discipleship)?

Which do you think is more difficult, living for Christ or dying for Christ? Why?

What are some ways you could be a vital help to your church in its mission? What gifts, skills, or interests do you have that could help advance the Gospel in your community?

Philippians 1:27-30 [Read]

Sub-Point 3: Paul encourages the Philippians to stand firm and unified in their suffering.

According to verse 27-28, what does it mean to live a life worthy of the Gospel?

Why is unity important when it comes to fulfilling a mission?

Why would this be a sign of their salvation to their opponents?

How can we help each other stand firm? Strive together for the Gospel?

The word used here for “let your manner of life” is uncommon for the New Testament (v. 27). It’s a very specific word that means “live as a citizen” and is actually connected to the word from which we get our word “politics.” Remember what we learned about Philippi in our first lesson, that they were an official Roman city? Its citizens had full Roman citizenship and legal benefits, which would have been a source of great pride and superiority in their culture. Paul intentionally uses this word to subtly challenge their thinking. A more literal translation would be “live as a citizen worthy of the Gospel” (which is in the footnotes of the ESV). Paul will say it more explicitly a few chapters later: *Our citizenship is in heaven* (Philippians 3:20). For the same reason that “to die is gain” for Paul, to live means living as citizens of a greater kingdom.^{vii}

Paul describes how to live as a citizen worthy of the Gospel:

- *Standing firm* (v. 27)

- *In one spirit, with one mind* (v. 27)
- *Striving side-by-side for the faith of the Gospel* (v. 27)
- *Not frightened in anything by your opponents* (v. 28)

Paul again emphasizes their mission, what they are to strive for – the Gospel. By standing firm in unity. No matter what happened, no matter what their opponents did to them, even unto death. Striving side-by-side. The imagery is of a team working together, side-by-side accomplishing a goal.^{viii} Imagine a soccer team working together to pass the ball down the field. Or a team of coworkers at a company working together to complete a project. Or a cast and crew working together to make a film. We simply cannot complete our mission if we don't all work together.

A house divided will not stand (Mark 3:25). Paul said it from the beginning of this letter and he will continue to say it – we need each other to advance the Gospel. Paul described this need for unity as parts of the body of Christ in many of his writings. Trying to do it alone would be like an arm without the rest of the body – useless. (Romans 12:4; 1 Corinthians 10:17, 12:7–27; Ephesians 2:16–18, 4:4–16).

Paul wrote that the way they lived as a body would be a clear sign to their opponents of their salvation and their opponents' destruction (v. 28). This word “clear sign” carried the meaning of proof or evidence in court when determining innocence or guilt.^{ix} If the Philippians lived as citizens worthy of the Gospel, they would be living proof of the Gospel. Even to their opponents. If they stayed strong in their faith and unified, without fear, even in the midst of suffering, their opponents would see that their faith was real. Advancing the Gospel not only means both evangelism and discipleship, but it also means living our lives as a witness.

All of this leads Paul to his final point of connection—what he has been building up to this whole chapter. It has been granted to the Philippians to suffer for the Gospel just as Paul had (vv. 29-30). *Granted* to them, as if it were a gift, a blessing, an honor. That word for “granted” in this verse is another form of the word for “grace” or “favor.” It means “to show favor, to give freely.”^x Suffering can be a gift from God because it can mold us into who God wants us to be (Romans 5:3-5). Paul didn't actually enjoy suffering, but he saw suffering as an opportunity to share in Christ's suffering, to become more like Jesus (Philippians 3:10; Romans 8:17).

The way we handle our suffering can be one of the greatest testimonies of our faith. When unbelievers see believers weathering suffering with peace and joy, they know there is something different about our faith, and they want to know more.

Paul didn't just resign himself to suffering; he rejoiced in his sufferings. He saw privileges in suffering for Christ's kingdom the way the Philippians saw privileges in their Roman citizenship.^{xi} He told the Philippians that suffering for Christ was the way to advance the Gospel (v. 12), the way for Christ to be exalted (v. 20), and the way to experience God's grace (v. 29).

Just as Paul had found joy and purpose in his suffering, so the Philippians can find joy and purpose in their suffering. Just as God used Paul's suffering to advance the Gospel, so can God use the Philippians' suffering to advance the Gospel. Because for Paul, to live is Christ; anything that brings him closer to Christ and/or serves the mission of Christ is joy.

How is the Christian view of suffering different from the world's?

Why is suffering for Christ worth it?

How can God use our suffering to help others?

Week 3, Philippians 1:18-30

Took

Main Point: We advance the Gospel by living for Christ in all that we do.

For Paul, Jesus wasn't just the most important thing in his life. Jesus *was* life.

Let's go back to that list of top 10 most important things. Since you crossed out nine of them, re-write the list, again in no particular order. This time, instead of ranking them, discuss with a partner how you can glorify God with each of those things. How you can use each of those things for Jesus and His mission?

Challenges

Pray for God to help us center our lives around Jesus. God calls believers to a new identity with a new purpose. Christ must be our primary goal, directing everything we do.

Seek unity in the Gospel. In a divided world, the call to unity among God's people is more important than ever. The unbelieving world is watching. When they see discord and infighting, they don't want to be a part of our body. Satan loves to distract us from our mission by turning us on each other. It is hard to work to stay unified, but it is essential to the success of the mission.

Rejoice in sufferings. If you are suffering, ask God for eyes to see the good in it. To see how He is working in you. Ask Him for peace, and trust in Him that He is working it all out for our good and His glory. The way you handle suffering will be one of the greatest testimonies you will ever give to God's goodness.

ⁱ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 108.

ⁱⁱ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary v. 32 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1991), 80.

ⁱⁱⁱ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 80.

^{iv} Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 108.

^v G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 85.

^{vi} Strong's #4297

^{vii} Tony Merida, Francis Chan, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, Christ Centered Exposition Commentary (Holman Reference Publishers, 2016), 75.

^{viii} Tony Merida, Francis Chan, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, Christ Centered Exposition Commentary (Holman Reference Publishers, 2016), 78.

^{ix} Francis Brown et al., BDAG (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 332.

^x Strong's 5483

^{xi} Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary v. 32 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman Press, 1991), 91.