

STUDY GUIDE

PLEASANT RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH
PHILIPPIANS: CITIZENS OF HEAVEN LIVING ON EARTH
TO LIVE IS CHRIST
PHILIPPIANS 1:18-26
09/17/2017



MAIN POINT

Living solely for Christ is the only life worth living.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What was the last win/win situation you found yourself in?

What emotions do you feel when something is win/win?

Can you think of any win/win situation from the Bible?

In Philippians 1:18-26, Paul encouraged the Philippians and acknowledging the fact that they had encouraged him as well. These verses reflect the tension within Paul. He was not afraid of death. He felt torn between the desire to depart and be with Christ and the desire to remain in the flesh and continue to help the Philippians grow in the faith. Whatever the outcome, Paul had the assurance that Christ would be glorified and the gospel would not be defeated.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 1:18-20.

In these verses, what did Paul express confidence in? Why was this cause for rejoicing?

When have you gained noticeable strength and confidence from the prayers of others? Describe what that situation was like and how you felt knowing other Christians were praying for you.

How does confidence in the gospel honor God, as Paul described in verse 20?

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 1:21-26.

For Paul, the entire purpose of life was to live for Christ. That's it. He knew the only reason he was alive was because God created and sustained him. For that reason, he had no interest in anything that didn't bring glory to his Creator. He desired to be apart from this world and walk truly with His Savior, but he also knew he had important ministry left to do. He knew there were people who needed him and he desired to point them to Christ. Paul's life was about glorifying Christ and serving people.

What did Paul mean by his statement in verse 21?

What would an attitude like Paul's look like in your life?

What are some of the things in this life that distract you from the hope of eternity?

Paul wanted the Philippians to understand that the possibility of his death did not mean defeat. Paul saw a twofold gain from death. First, he would experience the personal gain of being with Christ. Second, his death could be a gain for the gospel.

How does Paul's definition of life differ from how many people today view the purpose of life? Where do you see this tension most clearly lived out in our community?

Why did Paul consider that it would be a personal advantage to die? Why was he willing to lay aside this desire to continue his ministry with the Philippian Christians?

How would your life be different if we all sacrificed our personal interests in an effort to minister to others in the group? How would our group be different?

What impact did Paul hope his ministry would have on the Philippian Christians?

Paul did not know whether he would live or die, but he knew what was best for him and for the Philippian believers. Though his situation was unresolved, he was determined to continue his ministry as long as he could. Today, we can spread the gospel in the midst of unresolved situations. We can advance the gospel by our confidence in God's abiding grace.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Paul lived his life with the sole intention of helping others grow in their faith, and he sacrificed a lot in order to do it. That's how he was able to say that living is Christ and dying is gain. When we live a life motivated by our love for God and service to Him, our lives will naturally impact the people around us. People who don't know Christ will see Him through us, and our brothers and sisters in Christ will be encouraged by our confidence and hope in Him.

What in our culture makes it difficult to focus on Christ above everything else? What's at stake if Christians prioritize these things above Christ?

"For me, to live is . . ." Given your priorities and schedule this week, how would you honestly finish this sentence? What needs to change in your own life in order for you to be able to agree completely with Paul?

What are some things that might happen in our community if everyone at our church lived their lives solely for Christ and His work through them?

How does the gospel give you confidence in life? In death? Read 1 John 3:2-3 to help you answer.

Who do you have the opportunity to impact with your confidence in Christ and your ministry of the gospel?

PRAY

Close the session in prayer, asking God to give each of us an eternal perspective on life. Ask God to give each of us the strength to join Paul in his proclamation that “living is Christ and dying is gain.” Pray also that God will help us sacrifice our personal desires and interests to help other people grow in their relationship with Him.

COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS 1:18-26

Paul derived great joy from the gospel’s being spread, even by preachers with wrong motives (v. 18). He would continue to rejoice because of his confidence that his confinement would result in his deliverance (v. 19). Paul was confident that whatever happened to him, he would experience his salvation’s fulfillment or completion. He would live and continue to be delivered from sin’s power, or he would enter God’s presence for eternity.

Intercessory prayer would be instrumental in Paul’s release or vindication. Knowing that his friends continued to pray for him would encourage and strengthen him. Their praying also would issue in further expressions of care for him. Most of all, Paul would receive help from the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The phrase the Spirit of Jesus Christ is a synonym for the Holy Spirit.

As Paul awaited his pending trial’s outcome, his primary goal was to conduct himself well no matter what happened. The Greek term translated eager expectation presents the picture of watching with one’s head stretched out, looking with focused attention. The term hope conveys the idea of confidence. Paul wanted to retain the same boldness he had demonstrated in his previous efforts to spread the gospel so that Christ would be highly honored in his body—that is, in his person. Amid the daily stress of imprisonment, and regardless of whether he lived or died, Paul wanted to magnify his Lord (v. 20).

If Paul’s trial resulted in his release, the apostle would live for Christ in a manner that would honor Him (v. 21). If he were to be executed, he would experience the immeasurable gain of being with Christ in eternity. Because of his confidence that death would be a transition to a fuller relationship with Christ, Paul was torn between living and dying. If he continued to live, he would have the opportunity to continue his life’s work of spreading the gospel. He was genuinely perplexed about which option he should choose. If Paul had only himself to consider, he would choose to depart and be with Christ. Paul’s deepest desire was to move on into eternity with Christ. Paul termed this transition as far better for him (v. 22).

However, Paul had more to consider than himself. As was characteristic of him, he put Christ’s cause and others’ welfare above his preference. He would rather die and enter Christ’s presence in eternity, but to remain in the flesh was more necessary for the Philippian believers. His being acquitted and freed to continue his work was critical for the Philippian Christians’ continued spiritual development. Their needs outweighed his “desire to depart and be with Christ” (v. 23).

Paul’s being released and continuing his work would result in the Philippian believers’ progress and joy in the faith (v. 25). His continuing ministry on their behalf would enable them to grow toward spiritual maturity. His service also would enhance their joy and security as Christ’s followers. Paul’s exoneration and release would allow him to visit the Philippian Christians again (v. 26). The effect of his visit would be that their confidence would grow in Christ Jesus.

Max Anders - Galatians-Colossians, vol. 8, *Holman New Testament Commentary*

1:18. Some Christians wanted to harm the messenger, Paul. Yet he was not concerned for himself. He focused strictly on the message. Even though the gospel was being proclaimed with mixed motives, the message, nevertheless, was Christ. Even wrong motives could result in actions that let people come to know Jesus. So Paul emphasized the results, not the reasons, and rejoiced.

1:19. Paul was detained; but the gospel was still going forth, so Paul remained encouraged. He had faith something good would happen to him. Why? Because the Philippians prayed and the Spirit of Jesus Christ remained at work. So Paul looked expectantly to the day he would leave prison but at the same time comprehended that he could be executed.

1:20. Whether he regained his freedom to minister outside of prison or went to be with the Lord in heaven, he did not want to be ashamed of his testimony for Christ. Whatever took place, he desired for Christ to be exalted in his body. What was required to avoid shame and ensure exaltation of Christ? Courage! The internal strength to live for Christ or die for Christ, whichever was required. Only such courageous living exalts Christ.

1:21. Many people believe this verse is the most important of the entire book. It demonstrates that Christ is the source of meaning for Paul. He announced: to live is Christ. In death the adversities of this life would be over, and he would be with Christ in heaven. Therefore, to die is gain.

1:22–24. Paul conveys the dilemma of his situation. The apostle was so committed to the cause of Christ that staying on earth had its advantages but so did departing and going to heaven. To live means fruitful labor. He could remain ministering and spreading the gospel. To die means eternity with Christ. Given a choice in the matter, Paul did not know his decision.

Being with Christ appeals to him. It would certainly be an improvement in his present circumstances. Yet he places the needs of his readers ahead of his desire. Staying lets them benefit from his ministry.

1:25–26. Paul knew Christ's mind, a mind that put the needs of others above personal desires, so Paul knew he would remain on earth to minister to the churches. Paul considered the welfare of fellow Christians more important than his desire to go to heaven. By enduring on earth, he could assist their spiritual growth and joy in the Christian faith. This joy is not from circumstances but from a relationship in Christ Jesus, the source of true joy for believers.

Richard R. Melick - Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, vol. 32, *The New American Commentary*

1:26 The specific statement is that Paul's presence would bring great joy. It was a joy in Christ through Paul's release. A similar statement occurs in 4:10, where Paul said, "I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me." Their financial support caused Paul to worship and praise the Lord, who sent it through them. Naturally, the gift brought joy, but the greater joy was what it meant in the work of the Lord. Applying that understanding here, Paul realized that his presence provided an occasion for worship and praise. In spite of the similarity of 1:26 and 4:10, two different words describe "joy." In 4:10, Paul used *chaire*, "to rejoice" or "be glad." Here, the word is *kaucha*, "to boast or be proud." *Kaucha* often suggests an occasion or object of the joy and has the sense of "taking pride in" something specific.

Three complementary phrases explain the ground of their glorying. First, it would "overflow" in Christ Jesus. For Paul, Jesus was always the basis of joy. Second, it would be through Paul as representing Christ. Paul, as apostle, brought Christ to them, and they longed to see him again. He was their best example of Jesus. Third, they would boast because of Paul's presence with them again. Additionally, there may be an overtone of joy that the trial would be over and that the work of the Lord could go forth.

Paul's words express his optimism. Without a doubt, he expected to continue his ministry after the trial. Even so, he contemplated the realities of what could happen and how he would respond to the worst of situations. He would triumph. If he went to be with his Lord, that was triumph. If he stayed with them, they would be helped. But as he understood the work of the Lord, he would remain to further their faith.

This passage suggests that Paul anticipated a visit to Philippi upon his release. The same expectation occurred in Colossians and Philemon. Paul's plans to go to Spain had been postponed. Perhaps he sought the strength of fellowship that his converts provided. Perhaps he knew they needed him. At any rate, they would prosper if God allowed him to remain on earth.