

## Philippians 1:19-26 - "Life Abundantly"

**Introduction:** What is "the good life?" When I was in college, I took a course called "The Humanities in Western Culture" in which we studied the ancient Greek idea of "the good life." What I found to be very much lacking in the class lectures and in the textbook we read was any meaningful, concrete definition of what "the good life" actually was. Greek philosophers said it was to be: "happy." That is about as specific as it got. What would make men genuinely happy, and what is happiness anyway? Some thought happiness was to be found in pleasure, others thought it would be found in moderation, others thought it would be found in service to others, others thought it would be found in being passively submissive to the idea of "fate" - what is going to happen is going to happen, don't fight it.  
**Question:** What do all of these ideas about happiness have in common? Almost nothing.

**What is life and what is worth doing if anything?** These questions have vexed man since the fall - since man lost communion with God. There exists now a haunting emptiness and weightlessness to our existence. Is there anything that can be done for which there will be lasting significance? And even if there is, what good is it to us?

**Atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell said:** "WE HAVE SEEN HOW the universe is destined to end in darkness; what, then, is the fate of life? In an open universe, it would seem that every entity, every being, every thought, must come to an end. ... All the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction ... The whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins"

**King Solomon summarizes the emptiness of life without God in these words: Eccles. 2:10-11** [10] Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. [11] Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.

What we see in the book of Philippians in general and in this specific passage - Philippians 1:19-26 - is an expression of an unconquerable happiness. The primary point of application every one of us ought to take from this portion of inspired Scripture is that what we have in Christ is priceless and outshines ***even the most ideal world we could possibly imagine for ourselves***. And yet, how quickly we forget this truth, and how easily we are distracted from its joy and simplicity.

**1) Confidence in Prayer - v19-20; 2) On Being a Christian - v21; 3) A Heart that is Torn - v22-26**

### *1. Confidence in Prayer - v19-20*

**[19] For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,**

**Point:** Paul is quite confident that circumstances will turn out for his deliverance - i.e. his release - from prison. And why? *He knew the Philippians were praying for him.*

**Question:** Why do we pray for God to do things - to rescue people from imprisonment, to be healed from sickness, to save people's souls, etc. if we also believe that God has, from all eternity, already foreordained everything that comes to pass? What difference could our prayers make?

**Correction:** One way in which people misunderstand the Bible's teaching about God's sovereignty and His decrees is this: *They think that God has only determined the way things turn out at the end, and fail to recognize that God has also decreed the means by which all things will come to pass.*

**WSC Q7:** What are the decrees of God? **Answer:** The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his own will, whereby, for His own glory, He has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. **[Notice, God does not just decree how all things turn out *in the end*, but also every event leading up to those ends. And this most certainly includes every prayer God's people have ever and will ever pray!]**

**Application:** If there has ever existed a group of Christian people who ought to be the most committed to prayer - it is Reformed Presbyterian Calvinists. Why? Because every time I bow my head to pray, I can know for sure that the God of heaven and earth, the Almighty and Sovereign Master of the Universe irreversibly decreed from all eternity that I would bow my head at that very moment and pray for those very things.

**Application 2:** What a great confidence and joy it is to know this! The prayers I offer to God were themselves decreed by God - to accomplish His own divine purposes.

**Illustration: James 5:14-18** [14] Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. [15] And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. [16] Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. [17] Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. [18] And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

⇒ How did the rain stop in Elijah's day? ***Through Elijah's prayer.***

⇒ Could God have just stopped the rain Himself? Yes... BUT, in this case, God's decree was to use Elijah's prayers as the means by which the rain would be stopped.

⇒ How did the rain start back up? ***Through Elijah's prayer.***

⇒ **Notice** the end of v16: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."

**Application 3:** If God could be surprised by anything, I think He would be surprised at how little we ask of Him!

***[20] according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.***

**Point:** Paul is also confident *on account of the prayers being offered for him*, that he will "in nothing be ashamed..." but will continue to be bold, and to magnify Christ in his body.

**Application:** Paul is confident that his faith in Christ and his desire to exalt Christ will not be shaken by any trial. People are praying for his steadfastness in his trials, therefore it is Paul's ***expectation*** that he will not be put to shame.

**Application 2:** Whether he lives or dies - *Christ will be magnified in his body.*

**Romans 14:8** For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

**Application 3:** Do you have an "earnest expectation" regarding prayers you pray?

**James 1:5-8** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. [6] But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; [8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

## *2. On Being a Christian - v21*

***[21] For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.***

**Point:** This statement is unique. Being imprisoned and deprived of freedom and of many enjoyments, pleasures, and necessities of life caused Paul to meditate on what life really is. He is

also considering how wonderful it is to be in the hands of Jesus - and to truly know the one true God. And thus he makes this remarkable statement:

**“For to me, to live is Christ”** - Having Jesus Christ as your possession and treasure so far outweighs every earthly good, pleasure, and treasure.

**Illustration:** If you were to take every luxury, every earthly good or pleasure, and every bit of wealth - men of low degree and men of high degree together - and put them on a scale and put the glory of knowing Christ on the other side... there is no comparison. What is the difference if you subtract even a huge finite number from infinity? The difference is still infinity.

**Psalm 62:8** Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

**Psalm 73:25-26** Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. [26] My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

**Application:** What Paul says here is a reflection of where his treasure is:

**Matthew 6:19-21** "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; [20] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**What is it that you value most? Where is your treasure?** If your treasure is located here - you will live in insecurity, anxiety, and uncertainty. But if your treasure is Christ and the beauty of the One True and Living God, then your treasure is safe and secure - and you will never lose it!

**1 Peter 1:3-9** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, [5] who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. [6] In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, [8] whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, [9] receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls.

**Our Lord Jesus also taught us: Mark 8:36-38** For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? [37] Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? [38] For **whoever is ashamed of Me and My words** in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

**Application 2:** Do you remember Paul's words we just read in v20? *[20] according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.*

**Application 3:** If faced with a situation in life where it might cost us money, security, our job, our friends, or our possessions - **Is there even the smallest part of your heart that is divided in its loyalty to Christ? Would you ever be ashamed of Him and of your hope in Him?**

**Application 4:** The temptation has been there for every generation of Christians to be ashamed of Christ because of the cost of following Him. And that cost will be a world of unbelief that hates both Him and his followers.

**John 15:18, 20b-21** "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. ... If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. [21] But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

**Application 5:** Is this a price we are willing to pay?

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

**Question/final application of point 2:** Do you say with Paul: “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”? Is Jesus the foundation upon which all else in your life is built, or is he just one piece among the many other pieces of your life?

### *3. A Heart that is Torn - v22-26*

**[22] But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. [23] For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.**

**Point:** Paul is well aware that God is sovereign, and that as long as he continues to live, *fruit will be born* because Christ lives in him.

**Illustration:** Even if our outward circumstances look dark and dreary, we can always be confident that our Good Shepherd continues to lead us beside the still waters. We may be confident that fruit will continue to grow on our branches *to the praise and glory of God and to the good of our fellow man.*

**Application:** So confident is Paul is this truth that he knows that the continuation of his physical life here “will mean fruit from my labor.” And yet there is also a tremendous desire to be with Christ *now*. It is remarkable to consider - mankind through all the ages has been vexed and haunted and fearful of death.

**Illustration 2:** I once saw video footage taken by missionaries of a funeral that took place on remote tribe of Papua New Guinea - and the display of grief was absolutely pathetic... people falling down on the ground and literally wailing... It was frightening to watch.

**Application 2:** But when those same missionaries had spent 2 years there explaining the gospel and many of the tribal people became believers, the elders of that tribe told the missionaries: “For the very first time in our tribe’s living memory, people are dying peacefully. They die with confidence and hope - no longer crying out for a healer, or for a shaman to try to keep them alive. People die knowing they are forgiven and with the hope of being with Christ and rising again.”

**Application 3:** Do you know the wonderful mindset that Paul exhibits here? 1) To continue living means bearing fruit for Christ, 2) Death marks the beginning of our eternal, sin-free life with Christ.

**[24] Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. [25] And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, [26] that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.**

**Point:** Although in the deepest part of his heart, Paul would prefer that which he described as “far better” which is to die and be with Christ, he was confident that *because of the prayers being offered for his well-being and release, that he would continue to live for awhile still.* And in this, Paul rejoices.

**Application:** No matter how our days are - whether they are bright and happy, or dark and sad - we must be thankful for the life God has given us - our very short number of days in this world. And we must see them as short and fleeting. You and I will not live forever. And we would all do well to cultivate the very kind of perspective we see in Paul in our passage here. The Psalmist agreed:

**Psalm 39:4-7** "Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am. [5] Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my age is as nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah [6] Surely every man walks about like a shadow; Surely they busy themselves in vain; He heaps up riches, And does not know who will gather them. And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You."

### **1) Confidence in Prayer - v19-20; 2) On Being a Christian - v21; 3) A Heart that is Torn - v22-26**

**Jude 1:24-25** Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, [25] To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen.