

**When people ask you what you live for, how do you answer? How do you fill in the blank, “For me, to live is \_\_\_\_\_ what?”**

## **16 Phil To Live is Christ 2**

We have been putting meat on the bones of this famous statement of Paul’s – “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” We have seen the contrast between the way people in the world live and the way a genuine Christian lives. Some in the world will say, “for me to live is power,” while a genuine Christian would say, “For me to live is serving others.” Some in the world will say, “for me, to live is possessions,” but a genuine Christian will say, “for me, to live is giving.”

How do you fill in the blank? What do you say, “For me, to live is ... what? I hope Christ is enabling you to fill in the blank in the proper way. Let’s look at two more ways people fill in the blank in the wrong way and then see how Christ would do it.

Many say, “For to me, to live is ... pleasure.” There’s our third “P” word. Living for pleasure. Nothing wrong with pleasure. In fact, did you know God created us for pleasure – for his pleasure and ours. Our God is a God of pleasure. Our God is a joyful God. Our God is the God who made this beautiful planet with its exotic birds and flowers, it’s majestic mountains and canyons, and its beautiful streams and rivers. He is the God who thought of ... hold on to your seats ... sexual relations between a husband and a wife. Our bodies and the way they function are God’s idea. Hugh Hefner did not invent sex. God did!

But he, and a million others from early in history have perverted it, and every other wonderful pleasure God has given us to enjoy. He and a million others have also made pleasure the be all and the end all of life. We live in a culture of spoiled children, and I am not just speaking of literal children, but of adults who have never grown up and who live for one pleasure after another. The tragedy of it is that when pleasure becomes the center of life, we will find ourselves always consuming and never being satisfied. Imagine that, always eating and never being full, always drinking and never having our thirst quenched. That is because pleasures can never completely satisfy us – only a relationship with God can.

Christ came to put pleasure back into perspective. He enjoyed some of the pleasures of life. Often he would enjoy sumptuous meals with friends and for those he was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard – not that he overate or got drunk – but the religious leaders of

his day could not believe that he would eat with sinners. But Christ loved to have meals with them and enjoyed their company because he found in them hearts that were repentant, humble, and were seeking God.

But one day, when asked what the greatest commandment was he said, “Here is the greatest of all commandments – love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And a second is like it –love your neighbor as yourself. Everything hinges on these two commands.” Christ came to put things back in order, and genuine Christians, including Paul learned this. For them to live was to enjoy, first, the pleasures of God and then in a proper way to enjoy the other pleasures that he graciously gave us.

Here is the fourth “P”. For many, to live is “prestige”. For many people, life is about recognition, fame, being loved, and being known. That’s not all bad. We were created to be known by God and others. We were created to have meaningful relationships. But somehow this gets twisted inside us so that this legitimate need for being known and loved and accepted becomes consuming so that we are always hungering to be with people, always making sure they know we are there, or we always have to be the center of attention and we don’t know how to be content with ourselves and the way God made us.

I was teasing my wife the other day that there should be a reality TV show about her and her siblings. Then, we talked about how some people have these TV shows about them and how they live under the glare of camera lights. I think they must be addicted to it. What skills do they really have? What substantial character do they have worth observing and imitating? I think they are, sadly, empty shells. They are beautiful on the outside with nothing on the inside – like mannequins. What would happen if the lights were turned out and the magazine editors went away? They would have nothing to live for – the emptiness of their lives would be exposed. Maybe that would be good for them.

But what about Christ and his way? For us, to live is to make Him known, and to be known by him. Sometimes that means others will know who we are, but we are at peace and are content for others to know him. After all, he is the Savior, not us. And when it comes to relationships with others – we are happy to honor others. We are happy to put others first. We are happy to consider others more important than ourselves.

I have thought about this more than once for my life. I have thought, 300 years from now, will anyone know I even existed? What about 100 years from now or 50 years from now? And it made me feel kind of sad because there is a legitimate desire to be known, loved and accepted. And then I thought, “It doesn’t matter if I don’t become famous –even in church circles, as long as I am known by God.”

God will never forget you. He said of the children of Israel, “Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands,” (Isa 49:15-16).

And so with Paul, we say in Philippians 1:21 – “For to me to live is Christ and what we mean by this is that to us, to live is to be known by him”. He will never leave us. He will never forsake us. He will never forget us and we will always be important to him.

I hope these thoughts help you to make this verse, Philippians 1:21 come alive. But let’s see how Paul elaborated on it. He said:

But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. <sup>23</sup> But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; <sup>24</sup> yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

Paul described living for Christ as fruitful labor. He said in 1:21 “to live is Christ” and then in 1:22 he filled that out by saying “to live ... will mean fruitful labor.” Paul did not say, “I really want to get out of this Roman prison because I have this great vacation in mind and I really want to experience that before I die!”

Did any of you see the movie, “The Bucket List” about two old men who were in their last years and they had a list of things they wanted to do and see before the “kicked the bucket”? That’s not entirely bad, and I have to admit there are a few things I would like to see and do, but that is not my focus and that certainly is not Paul’s focus. Paul said, “to live is Christ and if I do get out of this prison it means more fruitful labor for me.”

Recently I have been thinking about the glories of being with Christ. I think part of it is because in my own personal time with the Lord I have been studying the book of Revelation and it has increased my desire for the return of Christ and being with him forever. Sometimes I have thought of my death and looked forward to going to heaven and being with him. But I have always come back to this: Lord, give me strength for many more years because there are several things you have put on my heart to do before I die. For me to live is Christ and that means fruitful labor.

And so Paul had this dilemma. He said, “on the one hand, I would really like to be with Christ,” but on the other hand I think I need to be with you. To be with Christ is far better. But to stay with you will help you on your spiritual journey.”

Paul continued to weigh the options and at first he said, “I don’t know which to choose.” I love this passage because it shows Paul “thinking out loud,” and it shows his reasoning

processes. Paul really felt squeezed on this one. He said, “I am hard-pressed from both directions.”

He kept writing about it. He said, “To be with Christ is so much better,” but, on the other hand, “to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.” Then the light bulbs turned on – “for your sake”. Oh, Paul must have thought – what is best for others? If it is best for others, then there is no debate. I will stay here and continue serving as long as God gives me strength. And so Paul concludes: “Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.”

Here was a man who had been changed by love. He was willing to put off his peace, his joy, his rest, and his fellowship with Christ in heaven, for as long as it took, in order to help others grow in their faith and be more stable. That’s what life was to him –fruitful labor in helping others grow.

Now there is one thing we have not covered in this rich passage. Paul said, “to die is gain,” and we can’t move forward without taking a look at that and so tomorrow we’ll continue in this section by looking at the gain that comes to us, when we depart this life through death and go to live with Christ.