

# Why Go on Living?

Joy by Example Part 06  
Philippians 1:21-26 2-14-2016

Summary: People who contemplate suicide usually hesitate for fear that what is on the other side might even be worse than their current situation. In their dilemma, they opt for whichever option they think will have the least suffering. But for Paul the dilemma was not which of two bad options was worse, but which of two good options was best. It was hard because both options were so good. To live meant to exalt Christ. To die and experience it as gain because it meant being with Jesus, also exalted Christ. But when he realized it was better for the Philippians that he remain that tipped the scales because he considered their needs more important than his. Meaning in life comes from fulfilling your calling.

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**Philippians 1:20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.**

## Introduction

Two of the most famous authors ever to pick up a pen both wrote some of their most well-known words on the same topic. Shakespeare and the Apostle Paul.

### Shakespeare and Paul

You all know Shakespeare's famous words: "To be or not to be, that is the question." The character Hamlet is debating whether or not to commit suicide. To be or not to be – should I keep on living or just end it all? He is wrestling with the question of whether it would be better to live or to die.

Paul wrestled with that same question.

**Philippians 1:20 ... Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ... 22 Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two**

Just like Hamlet – he is struggling to decide whether it would be better to go on living or to die. If you think it’s morbid to consider the possibility that maybe dying would be better than living, think again. Everything Paul does in chapter 1 is put here for an example for us, and he wrestles with this question. It’s a good thing to think about, but we need to realize that there is a right way and a wrong way to look at it. Hamlet is a great example of the wrong way, and the Apostle Paul is going to show us the right way.

Hamlet is so miserable in his life that he wants to commit suicide so he can finally have relief. But then he gets to thinking about what might be on the other side. And what if it’s even worse than this life? So he decides against suicide. He says, “Conscience does make cowards of us all.” I’m afraid to commit suicide, because I’ve got a guilty conscience. I have done some things in this life that I’m not so sure I want to have to answer for if there’s a Judge out there somewhere.

According to Romans 1:32, deep down, people know there is a God, and they know they are answerable to him. And as a result, even though millions of people are miserable in this life, very few end up committing suicide. And that is what happens with Hamlet. He says, “As miserable as I am in this life, I don’t want to take my chances on what could be an even worse existence that I could never come back from. I think I’ll just stay put.”

Now let’s compare that with Paul. Hamlet’s dilemma was which of two horrible options would be worse. Paul’s dilemma was which of two wonderful options would be better. Hamlet can’t decide because both options are so miserable. Paul can’t decide because both options are so attractive. All through this passage he is weighing the advantages of each – just the pros, no cons. In verse 20, “On the one hand I could exalt Christ by living, but on the other hand I could exalt him by dying. To live is Christ, but to die is gain. Living will mean fruitful labor. But dying means I get to be with Christ, which is far better. But it’s more necessary for the Philippians’ progress and joy in the faith that I live. *This is an impossible decision!*”

How many of you would like to be like Paul – struggling to figure out which would be better – life or death, and you can’t figure it out because both options are so incredibly attractive? You can’t wait for that day when you die and go to be with Jesus, but in the meantime you are full of joy in this life. Paul is going to teach us how to get there. And he is going to do it in three parts. He is going to show us how to die in a way that exalts Christ. Then he is going to show us how to live life in a way that your life is so full of joy that you are ok with postponing heaven. And then he is going to show us something that will finally tip the scales in favor of one over the other. Those are his three points.

## Suicide

But before we get started on those, let me bring up one more difference between Paul and Hamlet. Hamlet was considering suicide; Paul was not. In 2:23 we see that Paul was prepared to accept whatever the court ended up deciding. So at no point does Paul consider taking his own life. Every human life, including your own, belongs to God and God alone. And taking your own life is just as much murder as taking someone else’s life. Hamlet was right to be afraid of suicide. The last thing you want to do is go to Judgment Day with the very last thing you ever did being murder.<sup>1</sup> The worst time to have a big, sketchy question mark over whether your faith is real or not is at the moment you die. Suicide is murder, it is disobedience to God, it is a lack of faith and trust in God, it is incredibly cruel to the people you leave behind, and there is a 100% guarantee that when you get on the other side you will regret having done it. However, none of that is the best reason for staying alive. The best reason for staying alive is joy in life.

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<sup>1</sup> Does that mean people who commit suicide all go to hell? Not necessarily. If you have true, genuine, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you will go to heaven when you die even if the very last thing you did was a sin. However, if you choose to commit suicide, the chances that your faith is real are actually pretty slim. God tells us that obeying him is the best way to go and is the best path to joy, and if we don’t believe that, then we don’t believe God, which means we don’t have faith. So with your eternal destiny at stake, the last thing you want to do is go into Judgment Day with the big question mark over whether or not your faith is real.

## Living for Exaltation

**20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ<sup>2</sup>**

I am full of joy because I know that my life is going to be a telescope. My life will be a lens that people will look through and see the glory of Christ like they have never seen it before. Paul says, "I'm happy, because I know that through your prayers that's going to happen. And it's going to happen one of two ways – either through my death or through my life". So let's talk about how it happens through his life. How is the Lord Jesus Christ going to be exalted and shown to be great by Paul staying alive? It will happen because for Paul, to live is Christ.

### Life Is Christ

If Paul is walking around on planet Earth, people will see Jesus - more so than if Paul is not walking around on planet Earth. **To me, to live is Christ** means as long as I am still breathing, the people who are around me will see Christ as great. They will hear me talking about what he is like. They will hear me talking about the experiences I have had of his attributes, and how they can have those same kinds of experiences. They will see me preferring closeness with Christ over the pleasures of this world. They will see me continue to rejoice even when I am suffering because of how satisfied I am through fellowship with Jesus Christ moment by moment. They will be eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ showing me mercy, and me making much of it and delighting in and rejoicing over it. They will see someone who found the Lord Jesus Christ to be like a treasure buried in a field, and in his joy, he couldn't wait to trade everything he has for that treasure. That is what Paul means by, to me, to live is Christ exalted.

### Running Game and Passing Game

Living to exalt Christ is such a win/win, because it doesn't matter if someone hinders your ministry. If you are able to do ministry, you exalt Christ that way. If they do things to make your ministry impossible, then you exalt Christ by having a godly reaction. So the enemy can't win. In football, the defense lines up in one way to defend against a run, and a different way to defend against a pass. So a team will keep on running the ball until the defense decides to focus on defending against the run. And when they do that, then you start passing the ball. Think of your ministry like your running game. It is a great way to advance the ball down the field. But when the enemy stacks his defenses against that and stymies your ministry, you go to the passing game. The passing game is responding to every hardship with joy. Our opponent has no defense against that. You try to do ministry, he throws up a big trial in front of you to impede your progress, and so you respond with joy in Christ and that has a bigger impact than your ministry would have had. So Satan removes the roadblock, and you go back to the running game.

If life, for you, is Christ exalted, then you can't lose. But if life is anything else, you will lose. Take out the word **Christ** in verse 21 and fill in the blank for your life. For me to live is \_\_\_\_\_. If someone looked at your credit card statement, saw how you spent your free time, saw what you daydream about, what you like to talk about the most, what would be in that blank? For me, to live is ... my career? For me, to live is my games? My recreation? My friends? My family? Ministry activity? What are you really living for? Whatever you put in that blank, if it is anything other than Christ, then the last word of the sentence switches from *gain* to *loss*. For me to live is money, then to die is going to be loss. If my life

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<sup>2</sup> There was a well-known saying back then that went like this: *zan Chrastos* – "life is good." The phrase Paul uses here is: *zan Christos* – "life is Christ." So it sounds like Paul is making a play on words from a popular slogan. *Zan Chrastos*? No – for me, *Zan Christos*. It would be kind of like in English saying, "Life is good? No, for me, Life is God."

is all about education, or career, or even family; then death is going to be loss for me because I can't bring any of that with me.

Now if you are a Christian, the blank is filled with Christ. If something else in this world is more important to you than Christ, you are not a Christian. But if you are like me, there is a constant tendency for other things to creep in to my heart so that it is Christ plus something else. If it is Christ plus anything then to die will be gain and loss.

And if you want to know what your Christ plus is, just ask, what is it that steals my joy? Nothing could steal Paul's joy because for Paul, to live was Christ ... plus nothing. He lived only for the exaltation of Christ.

## Dying for Profit

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

Gain in what way? Remember the context.

**20 ... Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 FOR, to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**

So to die is gain because my death will cause Christ to be exalted. How does that work? You can see how Christ would be exalted through his life if he stays alive and keeps preaching boldly. But how does his boldness translate to exalting Christ if that boldness gets him killed?

It exalts Christ because of his attitude that dying is **gain**. The word translated **gain** means *profit*. If Paul dies, he makes a big profit – he comes out way ahead. Comes out way ahead in what way? Obviously he's not talking about financial profit, so what kind of profit? Is it that he profits by escaping suffering?<sup>3</sup> No. That was the Hamlet's attitude. Paul doesn't say one word in his discussion about death here about escaping suffering. That's not even on his radar. Paul longed for heaven, but it wasn't mainly to escape suffering. When he says that being with Christ is **far better**, he is not saying it's far better than the suffering of this life. He saying it is far better than the best of this life. And the thing that makes it so much better is not relief from suffering, but rather being with Christ.

**23 ...I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far**

It is not the escaping that is so much better – it is the being with Christ part.

Paul loved the Lord Jesus Christ. He loved having fellowship with him throughout the day. He loved his interactions with Jesus. He loved experiencing what Jesus is like – all his various attributes. He loved that, and dying and going to heaven would mean experiencing all that unhindered. In this life, things get in the way. We can't see him or hear him or touch him. We are distracted by the flesh. We have sin in us that clouds our view of Christ's glory. We have all kinds of human weakness that makes it hard for us to concentrate and focus. We have trouble believing the truth about him. So many things get in the way of our fellowship with him in this life, and so Paul was really excited about that day when none of those obstacles would exist anymore. Unhindered enjoyment of Christ.

That is the great prize that God offers humanity as a free gift. And the great majority of people see that and say, "Uh, yeah, whatever. That's not very valuable to me." But Paul looked at that and said, "That is more valuable to me than every treasure in this world all put together. It is more valuable to me even in life itself. If I lose life but gain that, I come out way ahead in the deal."

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of death as gain in the sense of escaping suffering was part of Greek mythology in Paul's day. In the story of Oedipus, Antigone says, "Whoever lives in as many ills as I—how does this one not get gain [κέρδος] by dying?" (Sophocles, *Ant.* 463–64). And Io, upon being told by Prometheus of sufferings still to come, cries out, "What gain [κέρδος] have I then in life? Why did not I hurl myself from this rugged rock?... Better it were to die [κρεῖσσον θανεῖν] once for all than linger out all my days in misery" (Aeschylus, *Prom.* 747–51; cf. Euripides, *Med.* 145–47; Plato, *Apol.* 40c–e; see Gnllka; Palmer, *NovT* 17.3 [1975] 203–18, for the best collection of similar expressions; see also Sir 41:2b–4 (Hawthorne, G. F. (2004). *Philippians* (Vol. 43, p. 56).

And that attitude is how Paul's death would exalt Christ (show Christ to be great) in his death. You show Christ to be great when close fellowship with him is more valuable to you than your own life, and when losing everything and gaining that is, in your books, a profit.

And not just a little profit. The phrase **better by far** in verse 23 is a very strong phrase. It is a rare triple comparative – literally “much more better.” Being with Jesus Christ wasn't just a little bit more valuable than the treasures of this world, or life itself; it was infinitely more valuable to Paul.

Jesus Christ is not automatically exalted just because someone dies. Everybody dies. Jesus Christ is exalted when somebody dies, and he experiences that death as gain or profit, because it means he gets to go and be with Jesus Christ.

## The Intermediate State

And as an aside, it is worth taking a moment to remind ourselves of what happens when a Christian dies. Most of the time, when the New Testament writers talked about being with Christ in the next life, they talked about it in terms of the Second Coming - after the resurrection of the righteous. That's our great hope. So what we have here is a comparatively rare discussion of what takes place between the time you die and the time Jesus comes back. Theologians call this the intermediate state - that time between death and the resurrection. What happens to you right after you die?

## Soul Sleep

Our Adventist friends believe that there is no conscious existence for those people right now. They teach that when you die, your soul just goes to sleep until Jesus comes back. That is the doctrine known as *soul sleep*. But that doctrine is refuted by this passage. Paul says “to me **to die is gain**,” not “for me to die is a nap.”<sup>4</sup> Remember what Jesus told the thief on the cross?

**Luke 23:43 “... today you will be with me in paradise.”<sup>5</sup>**

In 2 Corinthians 5:8 Paul is clear that being away from the body means being at home with the Lord. In Revelation 6 the martyrs ask God how much longer until Judgment Day. They are in that intermediate state after death and before the Second Coming, and they are wide-awake, asking God a question. In Luke 16 Jesus tells us about Lazarus and the rich man. They both die, and Lazarus was taken to a place of comfort, and the rich man was taken to a place of fiery torment. And when the rich man asks that Lazarus come and give him some water, Abraham doesn't say, “No, I don't want to wake him up right now.” He says, “Lazarus is being comforted right now.”<sup>6</sup> When a Christian dies, there is no purgatory, there is no soul sleep, there is no waiting period, there is no transition process, there is no gap of any kind between your last moment in this world in your first moment in paradise with Christ.

When a Christian dies, his or her body stays in the ground, but the soul instantly goes to a place of comfort that is a glorious paradise. And the reason it is such a wonderful paradise is Christ is there with you. Take Christ out of that place and it would be hell. But with Christ there it is a glorious paradise that is far, far better than the most wonderful, conceivable experience here in this life. And if you have a smile on your face when you die because you believe that, then your death shows Christ to be great.

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<sup>4</sup> The Adventists would argue that for the person who dies, it seems like you immediately go to be with Christ, because you are unaware of the intervening time while you are asleep. So as far as you know, you die one moment, and wake up the next moment with Christ. But that still doesn't work in this passage because Paul's dilemma is whether it is better to remain alive right now or to die right now. The comparison has to do with now. If it were a comparison between right now in the distant future, then there would be no dilemma. Paul could have both.

<sup>5</sup> The Adventist argument for this passage is that the word "today" refers to Jesus telling the truth, not when he will be in paradise. So Jesus' point was “You will eventually be with me in Paradise, and I'm telling you that information, not yesterday or tomorrow, but today.” This is a forced interpretation in the extreme.

<sup>6</sup> And we know this is prior to the Second Coming, because the rich man wants to go back and warn his brothers.

# Preferring to Serve

## The Dilemma

So, Paul has a dilemma. He only cares about exalting Christ. But if he can accomplish that by living or by dying, which one would be better?

### **22 ...Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two**

“I don’t know who to root for in my trial – the prosecution or the defense.”

He gets to daydreaming about, “What if they release me from prison and I can go have fruitful labor in Philippi?” And he finds that idea really tantalizing. But then he gets to thinking, “What if the verdict comes back ‘guilty’ and they chop off my head? Then I go immediately into the presence of Christ! That’s also tantalizing.” I don’t know which one I want more! The words he uses point to a really strong emotional conflict inside him. He really can’t decide. So in verses 20-23 he goes back and forth six times from the advantages of life to the advantages of death.

### **22 ... Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two**

So where does he land? He finally makes his decision in verse 25

### **25 Convinced of this, I know that I will ... remain**

Because of this thing I am convinced of, I think I’d rather remain in this world for now rather than go to heaven. What was it he was convinced of?

### **24 ...it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain**

It was more necessary for them - that piece of information tips the scales. But how does that make sense? He just said that going to be with Christ would be better by far. If it’s better by far, then isn’t that the option he should choose? Why does he say one option is better by far, and then he chooses the other option - the one that isn’t better? Two reasons: mission and love.

## Mission

Imagine a soldier in combat on the front lines, in a trench getting frostbite, miserable conditions, and he pulls out the picture of his wife and kids. A fellow soldier sees him looking at the picture and says, “Wouldn’t you rather be at home with your wife?”

“Oh yeah, that would be better than this by far.”

“So then why did you enlist?”

“Because this is something that needs to be done. I’m here because of the call of duty.”

Paul is an old man, and he trying to decide between rest or labor. And he chooses labor.

### **22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.**

He sees that at a big plus. God has planted in the human heart a deep hunger to accomplish what we were designed to do. A powerful drive to fulfill our purpose for existing. And that drive is even more compelling than our desire for comfort. I heard a pastor recently talking about how his wife really felt called to help women who are having hard pregnancies. If a woman in their church had young children, and she was going through a rough pregnancy, this woman would go over to her house and cook and clean everything and organize everything and take care of those kids, and she would come home absolutely exhausted. The work was so time-consuming and so taxing, that her husband told her, “Maybe you shouldn’t be doing this.” But they found when she stopped doing that work, it took away her joy. So she started doing it again, because she would rather have the joy than the rest.

If you are looking for a reason to go on living, find out what your calling is. It is not a question of whether you are called by God to do something. God calls every single one of his children to a particular role, and you will be assessed on Judgment Day with regard to how faithful you were in that role. If you are not sure exactly what your call is at this time in your life, that should be your prayer request in prayer group. Have the group pray and ask God to show you your calling. Ask your prayer group leader to help you discover it. We do a whole session on how to discover your calling in the Agape 101 class. You can watch that video on [foodforyoursoul.net](http://foodforyoursoul.net). You are not going to have the drive that you need to carry out your ministry properly until you are dead sure that you are called by God to do it.

This is what gave Paul so much motivation. Whenever Paul introduces himself at the beginning of the letter, he mentions his calling. You almost get the impression that “called” was his last name.

### **Romans 1:1 Paul ... called to be an apostle**

### **1 Corinthians 1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle**

His calling was his identity. People who are trying to find themselves, discover their true identity - maybe a teenager who is asking the question, “Who am I?” and they end up trying to make up their own identity. They decide, “I want to be known as an athlete,” or “I want to be known as being really smart,” or “I want to be known by my tattoos,” – all these efforts to carve out some kind of identity. But none of that satisfies, because the only identity that is really going to satisfy your hunger for identity is to be what God designed you to be. You were designed by your Maker to fulfill some function in the body of Christ as a body part. That is your identity, and when you figure out what that role is, and you start to understand the magnitude of the importance of the work that the body as a whole does, you will be driven by a call of duty that supersedes your desire for comfort.

And it’s not rocket science. Mostly it is just taking a look at all the various opportunities that are available to you right now, and out of those, whichever one fits your gifts and passions the closest – that is your calling right now.

“What about my job? Or my role in my family as a husband or wife or brother or sister or whatever? Isn’t that my calling?”

That’s part of it. If you follow God’s guidance and land in a particular job, then yes, that job is part of your calling. And your role in your family – that is also part of your calling. Your workplace is your mission field, and you are to be salt and light. And Scripture gives very clear instructions about the priority of ministering to your family. However, if you just read through the New Testament, you will find that, by far, the greatest emphasis when it comes to ministry has to do with your role in the body of Christ - serving the church with your spiritual gifts. That is emphasized in the New Testament even more than family responsibilities. So don’t get the idea, “I won’t do anything in the church because my calling is family or work.” Every body part has a role in the functioning of the body.

Think about how God designed the church to function. The church is the biggest, most powerful, most influential organization in the world. And it is run by volunteers. Think of what God wants the average guy in the church who has a family to do. He wants you to get up, go to work all day, then come home and spend some time with your wife and your kids. He also wants you to get the yard mowed, fix the broken whatever in your house, get your oil changed, clean the garage, stay in shape, balance your checkbook, get enough rest, etc. All of that is God’s will. So what does that leave you with? It leaves you with a tiny sliver of time for church ministry.

And so often people think, “My little sliver of time I have left is so tiny, why bother?” But you need to realize, this is God’s design. God’s design is for the greatest, most complex, most pervasive organization in the world to be run by the tiny slivers of time that all the members have. (There are some exceptions to that. Singles have the ability to do much more than married people. And some people’s job situation allows for more time. But for most of us, it’s a tiny sliver of time.) Each cell in the body only contributes a tiny bit to the overall work of the body. But if all the cells say, “My contribution is so small, I’ll just bow out” – then there is no body.

Don't fall into the error of thinking that the importance of your ministry is related to the amount of time it takes. If you go by that criterion, then the most important thing you ever do is sleep. The fact that something takes up most of your day doesn't mean that's the most important thing in your life. If we take our cues from the New Testament, then the most driving, motivating compulsion fueling our lives will be that little role that we play in the body of Christ. Fruitful ministry.

So that was one reason why Paul decided he wanted to stay in the body rather than go to heaven – mission. The other reason was love.

## Love

**24 ...it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith**

If the going to heaven and being with Christ option is far better, why does Paul choose the other option? Because going to be with Christ would be far better *for Paul*, but Paul staying in the body would be better for the Philippians. Paul is modeling something for us here that he is about to teach us at the beginning of chapter 2.

**Philippians 2:3 ...in humility consider others more important than yourselves.**

He says, "Man, when I think about my mission, it makes me want to keep going on earth. When I think about being with Christ, it makes me want to go to heaven. I can't decide, I can't decide." Then he realizes staying on earth is what is best for the Philippians at this point, and he says, "Oh, well then, that settles it! Of course I'll stay." Paul was more driven and motivated by his love for the Philippians than he was by his desire for the immediate enjoyment of the glories of heaven.

This is another huge difference between Paul and Hamlet. Hamlet ends up deciding on the option that he thinks will have the least amount of suffering. Paul ends up deciding on the option that he knows will have the most amount of suffering. And that's ironic, because they both decide on the same option – remaining alive. And yet both of them were right – for Hamlet it was the path of least suffering and for Paul it was the path of most suffering.

You see, if you don't know Christ, this life is the best you will ever experience. Even if your life is miserable, this life is the closest to heaven you will ever get. But for the believer, this life is the worst you will ever experience. Even if your life is fantastic, this life is the closest to hell that you will ever get. And knowing that enables you to endure that suffering for the sake of others, because you know it is only temporary. Relief will come soon enough, so in the meantime you can be focused on loving others.

And that really is the bottom line when it comes to ministry. The purpose of all ministry is love. When you serve someone using your spiritual gift, you are giving that person something of immeasurable value. When people don't serve in ministry, or they aren't very passionate about serving, it is usually because they are ignorant about the value of their gift.

**1 Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, as good stewards of God's multifaceted grace.**

A steward is a manager of a household. The owner of the household would give all the resources to the steward for him to manage, and it was the steward's job to distribute those resources to all the members of the household. The steward didn't own any of it – it wasn't for him. His job was to distribute it to the children. So if the steward decided you get a bowl of cereal for breakfast, then you get a bowl of cereal. If he decides you don't get any breakfast, then you don't get any. It was all up to the steward. And here Peter says that you are a steward of God's multifaceted grace. God's grace comes in lots of different forms. And one of those forms is distributed to the body of Christ through your spiritual gift. But it doesn't come to us automatically. It only comes to us if you distribute it. It is like that bowl of cereal – if you decide to dole it out, then we get it. If you decide not to, then we go without that form of grace.



And that form of grace that is distributed through your spiritual gift is something that is of priceless worth. Grace is the most valuable commodity there is. The people seated around you right now need grace more than they need anything else in the world. And it is up to you to distribute one of the forms of it.

What if, instead of grace, God gave you cash to distribute? You couldn't use it for yourself, but you could distribute as much of it as you wanted. You could just walk up to anyone at any time and write them a check for any amount as often as you wanted. If you have any love in your heart at all for people, don't you think you would be writing a lot of checks? Wouldn't you be giving a lot of cash to needy people?

What if it were cars? Some big car manufacturer hired you to just give away cars to whomever you wanted. When you found someone that really needed a car, wouldn't you give them a brand new one? Especially people you love.

Ministry is a function of love, but I think the thing that holds most people back from ministry isn't so much a lack of love as much as it is a lack of understanding of the value of the grace that they are a steward of. They don't realize the immense worth of what they have to offer. They think what they have to offer is just whatever is inside them. They don't realize that the main thing they have to offer has nothing to do with them; it is the resources of the head of the household distributed through their stewardship.

## A Reason for Living

So what should you do if you find that you are more like Hamlet than Paul? Life has lost its appeal, and you no longer have the desire to live. Or if you are convinced that no one loves you and no one would miss you, and that you are just not needed in this world. Feeling worthless or unneeded, unwanted – that's an incredibly painful feeling. What's the solution to that? More friends? Better friends? Getting married? Having kids? No. You would be amazed at how friends and kids and spouses can make you feel ten times more lonely and unwanted than you felt before.

No, in order to feel like your life matters and that you are needed, you have to actually *be* needed. You have to be doing something that really does make a difference, and really helps people in big, long-term, life-changing ways. That is the solution to suicidal tendencies.

Your life needs to be focused on giving people something they really need – which is something you can do. You have something that will change people's lives. You have something that will give people life. Give them fullness of life. You have something that, if you give it to others, it can make their lives go from being empty and dead to being full and rich and thriving. You can give them something that will make them go from being a dried up, shriveled, dead plant to being a flourishing, thriving green tree planted by streams of water and producing all kinds of wonderful fruit.

What is this thing that you have the power to give? God's grace. Grace is the most powerful and most valuable thing in this world, because it doesn't come from this world. Grace is the solution to any problem that anybody has, and it is the best solution. Your spiritual gift and your calling enable you to be in a position to distribute that grace to God's people, to help them make progress in the faith and to increase their joy in the faith. So Paul says, "I can't stand the thought of leaving this world until you guys have the same kind of joy in Christ that I've found."

**25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.**

And that word for **joy** in verse 26 is a stronger word than the one in verse 25. It refers to an especially motivational kind of joy that means to wear something as a badge of honor. In other places it is translated to glory, or to boast. It is the word he uses in chapter 3 when he is defining what a Christian is.

**Philippians 3:3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh**

A Christian is someone who wears the Lord Jesus Christ as a badge of honor. The kind of joy you feel when you have some badge of honor that you are especially proud of – that is the kind of joy Paul wants the Philippians to have.

Paul was passionate about ministry, not because he loved ministry, but because he loved people. And he knew the most loving thing you could possibly do for one of God's people is to supply them with grace through your spiritual gift in ministry.

I am not preaching this because I think we have a problem with servanthood in this church. I am actually thrilled with how many of you are serving in ministry. The vast majority of you are serving in some kind of ministry, and many of you are doing multiple different ministries. So I'm not preaching this because I see a need for more work to be done – I am preaching it because I want to see more joy than I see. I want more of you to know the joy of increasing other's joy in Christ. And with all the people serving, I fear there are some who are doing the work, but they aren't getting the joy. We can always drop programs if they are undermanned – that's not a big deal. But what we can't live without is joy, if we are going to be a healthy, successful church. So let's close with a moment of silent prayer. If you don't know your calling, ask God to show you. And keep asking him every single day until he makes it clear. If you do know your calling, ask God to open your eyes to the value of it, and to increase your love for his people, so that your joy might overflow as you work to make their joy overflow.

**Benediction: John 13:12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.**

**Application Questions (James 1:25)**

- 1) What is it in your life that threatens to fill in the blank: "For to me, to live is Christ plus \_\_\_\_\_."
- 2) What are your spiritual gifts? (If you're not sure, ask the group what they think)
- 3) What is your calling in the church at this time? (If you're not sure, mention two or three ministries in the church that are most important to you)