



GOSPEL  
*partnership*

DEVOTIONALS 3

# PHILIPPIANS 1:18<sub>B</sub>-30

<sup>18b</sup> Yes, and I will rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, <sup>20</sup> as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. <sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. <sup>24</sup> But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. <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 in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

<sup>27</sup> Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, <sup>30</sup> engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

*You'll see we've noted who has authored each devotional as a way to give context to the reader. Our thanks also to Becky Knapp who edits the devotionals each week.*

# DAY 1

PHILIPPIANS 1:18b - 20

<sup>18b</sup> Yes, and I will rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, <sup>20</sup> as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

"Have you reached a verdict?" ....

When all the evidence has been heard, motions presented, arguments made, the only thing left is for the jury to return the verdict. In many respects, this is Paul's situation in prison. He is awaiting his trial before Caesar and the verdict of either life or death. His fate is in the balance. Or is it? As we begin this section, Paul moves on from what has already happened to him to what will happen. However, what seems uncertain to us is certain to him. Christ, he says, will be honored in his body, by life or by death. Paul here asserts his confidence that no matter what the physical outcome of his trial will be, the heavenly reality is that Christ will be honored. His confidence is not in the Roman justice system but in the prayers of the saints and the help of the Spirit. So certain is his confidence, that he asserts that whether through death or life, he will be delivered.

Paul here displays a singular, Christ-centered focus that we will reflect on much more throughout the week. Today, two things stand out. First, Paul's confidence transcends his situation. When he assesses where he is in life, the difference-maker is not the Roman prison or even Caesar (arguably the most powerful man in the world at that time). What makes the difference for him is the Spirit of Christ working through the prayers of the people. This way of viewing the world and approaching our circumstances is held out as a way of life to lean into for all believers. I am sure that Paul had his moments of uncertainty or anxiety, but he practiced this dependence on Christ. Second, the result is full courage. This is such a rich idea. Standing against Rome, standing against Western polarized, post-Christian culture is not easy. United to Christ we have courage!

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, in life and in death, may you be honored in us. Grant us courage to follow and stand firm. Holy Spirit, be our help. In Jesus's name alone, we pray. Amen.*

-Andrew Vander Maas

# DAY 2

PHILIPPIANS 1:21-23

<sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell.

<sup>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

I am a fan of the St. Louis Cardinals, but they are not the singular pursuit of my life. There are times when it comes to sports or music or dance or a job or even our families that we may say that those things are the overwhelming pursuit of our life. For Paul, there is no mistaking his singular pursuit--to live is Christ; to die is gain. Christ--the anointed one, his Lord, the one who dwells in him by the Spirit, whose life, death, and resurrection have completely changed his outlook on his life and death--this One is his passion.

And while Christ gives shape and energy to his life, Paul knows that even in death his passion will be realized. This is not a death wish on Paul's part (as we will see tomorrow, he has a clear sense of purpose for living), but he is facing the possibility of execution and his thinking is clear--death is not a loss; it is gain. Many people have speculated over the exact nature of what Paul means by "gain." Suffice it to say that "death has lost its sting" and that to be absent from the body is to be present with Christ--this is gain (see 1 Cor. 15:56; 2 Cor. 5:8).

What stands out throughout this section, but perhaps most prominently here, is Paul's razor-sharp orientation to Christ. Having Christ in his sights is the only thing that matters to Paul. If he were to continue to live or if he should pass away means little to Paul. Only Christ matters. As we endure our own sufferings, as we battle temptations, as we make choices that affect our lives and the lives of those around us, we will be helped when we take our eyes off those things and place them on Christ.

## PRAYER

*Father, we long for the day when our faith shall be sight, but until that day comes may we be so filled with the satisfaction of the finished work of Christ that we too can say, "to live is Christ, to die is gain." We pray it in Jesus's most holy name. Amen.*

-Andrew Vander Maas

# DAY 3

PHILIPPIANS 1:24-26

<sup>24</sup> But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

<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 in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

What is the purpose of my life? This is the perennial question that we all wrestle with at some point along the way. Perhaps there are times when the answer is very clear—a mother with a newborn is to nurture her child; a running back is to carry the ball. Even if the ultimate answer is not so clear, the heat of the moment makes it obvious what our momentary purpose is.

The apostle Paul is yet imprisoned. He is unable to be with his beloved friends in Philippi. At the same time, he is faced with the possibility of his death. Paul may never return to see them again. This was probably not a sense of impending death like an official death sentence. Rather, Paul knew that the end of his life could come at any moment, especially because he was living for the gospel of Jesus in a society that did not welcome it.

Our brother Paul wrestles, but for a moment, with what purpose God has for him. Paul recognizes—as we saw yesterday—that to die is to depart and be with Christ. That’s an overwhelmingly good thing! Yet at the same time, to live is Christ. What? How could those two statements be true?

The passage for today’s reflection elucidates this seeming paradox. Paul recognizes that to live is to live for Christ, and specifically, to endeavor that Christ may be loved and worshiped among his friends. Inasmuch as Paul and the Philippians experienced the love and joy of Jesus at work in their midst, to live is Christ. Just as verse 19 mentions, this is according to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is in him that we can have assurance that somehow--though we may not understand how it will all work out--our present circumstances will surely result in our joy in the faith.

Paul’s orientation toward his imprisonment and toward his very life show us the power of a life set free by the gospel. Not only does he have tenacity empowered by hope, but in the middle of his sufferings, Paul is filled with a love that puts his friends before himself. Paul understood that Jesus didn’t just command us to “love our neighbors as ourselves.” It is as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15: “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”

When we receive the love of Jesus and place our trust in his gospel, the love of Christ always gives us the momentary and chief answer for our purpose. The reformer Martin Luther memorably put it this way: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

## PRAYER

*Father in heaven, thank you for the gospel of freedom from sin and death. Thank you that you have set us free from the demands of every man and woman, even ourselves. Thank you that we serve no one but you. Fill us with your joy and delight, that we might use our freedom in the service of your Kingdom, for the benefit of your people. We confess that too often loving other people does not sound or feel very appealing. Forgive us, Jesus, and renew our hearts today in your love. Amen.*

-Masakuni Hotta

# DAY 4

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-28

<sup>27</sup> Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, <sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

The best way to understand this text is to see the imperative (or command) in verse 27--“let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ”--as referring to the dual citizenship the Philippian believers had as citizens of a heavenly colony and as citizens of a Roman colony at the same time. One translation (NLT) even adds the phrase “you must live as citizens of heaven” before the phrase about how to conduct ourselves. So, the text means we are to live as a good citizen of an earthly state and as a good citizen of this new heavenly commonwealth to which the believers now belong. A good paraphrase would be: “As good citizens of heaven and as good citizens of Philippi, live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ!”

The believers’ good conduct as citizens of their heavenly colony, the church, will be a dynamic witness in their lives as citizens in their Roman colony. Certainly, Paul’s own experience in the testimony of his life and words to his Roman jailers backs this up. Surely Paul wants the Philippians to understand that the differences and tensions between these two colonies didn’t stop anyone from living fully for Christ no matter what the circumstances.

Paul goes on to say that we carry out a godly dual citizenship by standing firm together in one spirit. He is again bringing up the idea of partnership and the need for unity in the presentation of the gospel--not just by word, but by behavior. He comes back to this idea later in 2:15 when he says the believers should “be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” In the most simple terms, our behavior really matters, and one of the behaviors that matters the most is working peacefully together to help make the gospel visible to observers who see us every day in all kinds of circumstances.

The other behavior that Paul addresses is fear (v. 28). He knew that all the opposing strength and power of the Roman empire did not match up to God's kingdom. Trust in God should eliminate fear. That idea wasn't vague, wishful thinking. It was a demonstrable belief that he had been experiencing for years in his dealings with various mobs and government officials on his missionary sojourns. He must have thought of his experience in Philippi 10 years earlier when the prison chains were broken, and he and Silas were fully released the next day. He saw his salvation as being much more than a future event. He experienced and lived with it every day. There just wasn't any room for fear in that context. God was fully in charge of his current life and his life to come. Why should he fear anything?

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, there is a lot to be fearful of these days. And certainly, the media reminds of that fact loudly every day. Give us the same confidence in you that Paul demonstrated daily to his jailers. Give us the grace to work together in unity in demonstrating the truth of the gospel to each other and to our friends and neighbors. Remind us always that there is no opposition to your kingdom that can stand. We serve and follow the Lord of the universe.*

-Richard Malone



# DAY 5

PHILIPPIANS 1:29-30

<sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, <sup>30</sup> engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Today, we consider two gifts God gives his followers: faith in Christ and suffering for his sake.

Our faith in Christ is freely given to us by him, through him, and only because of him. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 30* says that the Holy Spirit works faith in us, uniting us to Christ in our calling. So the Spirit of God, who hovered over the face of the waters when the earth was void, before light was even created (Genesis 1:2), is the one who works faith in our hearts. Yes please! That's a gift from that powerful and loving source, and a joy to receive that is life-changing.

But as we see in this passage, we are granted another gift, and it is to suffer for the sake of Christ. This isn't the only place in scripture that suffering for the sake of Christ is seen as a wonderful thing. "Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name" (Acts 5:41). "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matthew 5:10-11).

We don't always know why we suffer. When we can clearly see our suffering has an eternal good purpose of advancing the kingdom, it might be more natural to view it as a gift. And the verses today are pointing us to the blessing of that kind of suffering: *it has been granted to you to . . . suffer for his sake*. The verses from Matthew 5 also say we are blessed when we are *persecuted for righteousness' sake*. So that's not referring to suffering for moving in the world in self-righteousness!

What are some ways we suffer for Christ? It could come as loneliness for not joining in on gossip sessions or teen vaping. People might make a caricature of us in our differing interpretations of how best to *do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God* (Micah 6:8b). We suffer for Christ in our job security when we shine a light on harmful business practices, or when we sacrificially share with someone in need, or even when we give of our time to be present and listen to those who are hurting. We suffer for Christ when we bless those who curse us.

In thinking of these things, let's remember that we mess up often. We do enter the gossip circle, or go with the party crowd; we do look down on each other for our politics or look the other way with shady things at work; we avoid the grieving and respond in kind to those who curse us. But let's preach the gospel to ourselves here for a moment. When we repent of our sin, God forgives us, and calls us to be renewed. That's why suffering for the sake of Christ is granted to us. It's a gift God wants to give us, so when we don't take the gift, when we choose comfort over suffering, he calls us back to it through the Holy Spirit or our conscience or our fellow Christians on the journey! Remember that when we read you in these verses, it's plural: Paul is writing *to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons...* (Phil 1:1b). So we can remind each other that our suffering for Christ is good, and seen in heaven, and used both in our lives and in the lives of others. Isn't it often more comforting to receive care from someone who is broken and being healed than from someone who has had year after year of ease? In that way, God can use all of our suffering for his kingdom.

Our faith in Christ and our suffering for his name are granted to us. And he will give us those gifts plus the strength to live with them.

## PRAYER

(using II Corinthians 1:3-7)

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort. Amen.*

-Linda Bokma-deJong and Susan Guerra