

Will We Live for Christ or Ourselves? A Life-Changing Decision- Philippians 1:20

In life, we make countless decisions every day - from what to wear to what to eat. But there's one decision that stands above all others, one that will define our lives forever. The apostle Paul presents this choice clearly in Philippians 1:21-26: Will we live for Christ or for ourselves?

The Decision That Defines Everything

Paul's words in Philippians 1:21 hit us with startling clarity: "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." This isn't the statement of someone who has given up - it's the declaration of someone who has made the most important decision of his life.

Paul finds himself in a paradox. If he lives, it's all for Christ. If he dies, he gains by being united face-to-face with his beloved Savior. Either way, Christ wins. This perspective came from a lifetime of suffering for Jesus - beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, imprisonment, and daily pressure from caring for the churches.

Why Death Seemed Preferable to Life

For Paul, death wasn't something to fear - it was almost preferable because it meant the end of suffering and the beginning of eternal joy with Christ. But life meant continued beatings, imprisonment, and hardship. Following God and living out the Great Commission has never been about comfort or ease.

Paul understood two foundational truths: this world is our temporary home where we must be missional, and heaven is our permanent home. These realities shaped how he viewed everything.

The Mission Matters More Than Comfort

When Paul says "if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me;" he's expressing an expectation. Living means doing fruitful work for God's kingdom. This connects back to Genesis 1, where God immediately gives humanity work to do after creating them.

Our real work isn't found in a 9-to-5 job, though that can be an excellent mission field. Our God-given work is to be fruitful for the kingdom - to make disciples, glorify God, and bring the news of Jesus to the world around us.

Paul's Difficult Choice

Paul describes himself as "torn between the two" - a word that literally means torn in two or deeply distressed, like a city under siege. He's overwhelmed by the decision because he knows that personally, he'd rather be with God. But for the sake of the Philippians, he needs to stay.

This is Paul laying down his desires for God's desires - one of the biggest themes of this passage. He chooses to continue fighting and serving the Lord rather than taking the easier path.

Three Keys to Surrender

1. Surrender Your Life to God

The cost of the gospel is surrender. Jesus asks for your entire life, not just a corner of it. He wants to be Lord of all areas of your life. In the short term, this hurts - admitting you're not lord of your own life is difficult. But in the long run, it's so worth it.

2. Surrender Your Plans to God

Paul didn't plan to be a prisoner in Rome or to share the gospel with the Imperial Guard. He planned to go to Spain. On a larger scale, he didn't grow up planning to preach Jesus - he planned to keep Judaism pure.

Throughout Scripture, we see the importance of trusting God with our plans. If Paul had gotten everything he wanted, we would never have the book of Philippians. If Moses had gotten his way, the Israelites would never have left Egypt.

Are you willing to go wherever God calls you? This starts with an open-handed attitude toward Jesus' call to "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Matthew 4:19).

3. Surrender Your Desires to God

Our desires are our motivations - what we long for and dream about. Every day we must decide whether we want to live for Christ or for ourselves. We never age out of this daily decision.

God desires that every person would know Him (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9). When we surrender our desires to God and let Him align our hearts with what He desires, our perspective begins to change. Instead of wanting what's most comfortable or easiest for us, we begin to desire what God desires.

The Path Forward Isn't Easy

Roman prison wasn't the path of least resistance for Paul, but it's exactly where God called him. The path of least resistance isn't going to your neighbor or making disciples, but that's what we're called to do.

Surrendering our desire for comfort is beautiful because our desires shift from being about us to being about what God desires. As we grow closer to God and desire Him more, the way we work, live, and interact with people around us changes - it becomes for God's glory and to see people saved.

Life Application

The challenge of Philippians 1:21-26 comes down to this choice: Will we live for Jesus or for ourselves? Each day this week, make the conscious decision to surrender your life, plans, and desires to God.

Like Joshua declared in Joshua 24:15, "As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord," will you commit to living for Christ regardless of the cost or where He calls you?

Questions for Reflection:

- *In what areas of your life are you still holding back from full surrender to God?*
- *How might your daily decisions change if you truly lived with the perspective that "to live is Christ"?*
- *What plans or desires do you need to surrender to God this week?*
- *Are you willing to go wherever God calls you, even if it's uncomfortable or difficult?*

The Decision- Small Group Discussion Guide

Summary

Paul faces a profound dilemma while imprisoned in Rome - whether to live or die. He declares 'to live is Christ and to die is gain,' explaining that living means continued fruitful ministry despite suffering, while dying means being united with Jesus. Paul ultimately chooses to remain for the sake of the Philippians' spiritual growth. The sermon challenges believers to make the daily decision to live for Christ rather than themselves, requiring surrender of our lives, plans, and desires to God's will and mission.

Intro Prayer

Father God, we come before You this morning grateful for Your Word and the example of Paul's surrender. We thank You that every day we can choose to live for You rather than ourselves. Lord, open our hearts and minds to what You want to teach us through this time together. Help us to be honest about areas where we struggle to surrender, and give us courage to follow wherever You lead. We ask that You would speak to each person here according to their need. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ice Breaker

What's one decision you made recently that you had to really think through - maybe something as simple as what to have for dinner or as big as a career choice?

Key Verses

1. Philippians 1:21-26
2. Matthew 4:19
3. Joshua 24:15
4. 2 Corinthians 11:22-33

Questions

1. Paul says 'to live is Christ and to die is gain.' What do you think he means by this, and how does this perspective challenge our typical view of life and death?
2. Paul describes being 'torn between two' - staying to minister or going to be with Christ. Have you ever felt torn between what you wanted and what you felt God was calling you to do?
3. The sermon mentions that Paul suffered greatly for the gospel (beatings, imprisonment, shipwrecks). Why do you think following Christ often involves difficulty rather than comfort?
4. Paul chose to remain for the sake of the Philippians' spiritual growth rather than his own preference. How can we apply this principle of putting others' spiritual needs before our

own desires?

5. The pastor talks about surrendering our plans to God. What are some plans or dreams you've had to surrender or might need to surrender to follow God's calling?
6. How does our culture's emphasis on comfort and self-fulfillment conflict with Paul's example of living for Christ?
7. Paul found purpose in 'fruitful work' - making disciples and glorifying God. How can we make our daily work, whether in an office or at home, part of God's mission?
8. The sermon ends with Joshua's declaration: 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' What would it look like for you to make this same commitment in your current circumstances?

Life Application

This week, identify one specific area where you've been living for your own comfort rather than for Christ's mission. It might be avoiding a difficult conversation about faith, holding back from serving others, or pursuing your own plans without seeking God's will. Take one concrete step to surrender that area to God and live more intentionally for His glory and the good of others.

Key Takeaways

1. We all must make the daily decision to live for Christ rather than ourselves
2. Following Christ requires surrendering our lives completely, not just giving God a small corner
3. We must surrender our plans to God, being willing to go wherever He calls us
4. We must surrender our desires to God, aligning our hearts with His desire for all people to know Him
5. Living for Christ means embracing discomfort and difficulty for the sake of the mission, not seeking the path of least resistance

Ending Prayer

Father God, thank You for Paul's example of complete surrender to You. We confess that too often we want to live for our own comfort and desires rather than for Your glory. Help us to make the daily choice to live for Christ, surrendering our plans and desires to You. Give us courage to step out of our comfort zones and into the mission You have for us. May we, like Paul, find our purpose in fruitful work for Your kingdom. As we go from here, help us to declare with Joshua, 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!' In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Decision- Daily Devotions

Day 1

The Ultimate Choice

Devotional: Every morning when you wake up, you face a fundamental choice that will shape your entire day: Will you live for Christ or for yourself? This isn't just a one-time decision made at salvation - it's a daily crossroads that determines the direction of our hearts and actions. Paul understood this choice intimately. Writing from a Roman prison cell, he could have easily focused on his circumstances, his discomfort, or his uncertain future. Instead, he declared something revolutionary: "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." His perspective wasn't shaped by his comfort level or personal preferences, but by his complete surrender to Christ's lordship. This choice isn't always easy. Living for Christ often means choosing the harder path, the one that requires sacrifice and surrender. It means putting God's desires above our own comfort zones. But here's the beautiful truth: when we choose to live for Christ, we discover a purpose and joy that transcends our circumstances. Today, you'll face countless small decisions - how to spend your time, what to prioritize, how to treat others, where to invest your energy. Each choice is an opportunity to declare, like Paul, that to live is Christ. When we make this choice consistently, we begin to see our lives through an eternal lens rather than a temporary one.

Bible Verse: "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." - Philippians 1:21

Reflection Question: What specific area of your life do you find most challenging to surrender to Christ's lordship?

Quote: We all have to make a decision. Will we live for Christ or ourselves?

Prayer: Lord, help me choose You over myself in every decision today. Give me the courage to live for Your glory rather than my comfort.

Day 2

Surrendering Our Lives

Devotional: Surrender is one of the most difficult concepts for us to embrace because it goes against our natural desire for control. We want to be the captains of our own ships, the authors of our own stories. But true discipleship begins with a radical surrender of our very lives to Christ. When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He's not asking for a partial commitment or weekend involvement. He's asking to be Lord of everything - our careers, relationships, finances, dreams, and daily decisions. This complete surrender can feel overwhelming, even frightening. We wonder, "What if God asks me to do something I don't want to do?" Yet here's the incredible truth: Jesus is going to be Lord whether we acknowledge it or not. The question isn't whether He has authority - it's whether we'll willingly submit to His loving leadership or resist it. When we surrender our lives to Him, we're not losing our identity; we're discovering who we were truly meant to be. Surrender isn't a one-time event but a daily choice. Each morning, we can wake up and say, "Lord, my life belongs to You today. Use me as You see fit." This daily surrender transforms ordinary moments into opportunities for kingdom impact and fills our lives with purpose beyond ourselves.

Bible Verse: "Follow me," he told them, "and I will make you fish for people." - Matthew 4:19

Reflection Question

What fears hold you back from completely surrendering your life to Christ's lordship?

Quote: Jesus needs to be Lord of all of us. That's the cost. The cost of the gospel is surrender.

Prayer: Jesus, I surrender my life to You completely. Help me trust Your leadership even when I can't see the full picture.

Day 3

Surrendering Our Plans

Devotional: We're natural planners, aren't we? We map out our careers, envision our futures, and create detailed roadmaps for our lives. While planning isn't wrong, problems arise when we hold our plans so tightly that we can't see God's better way. Paul never planned to write some of his most influential letters from a prison cell. He didn't wake up one day thinking, "I'd love to be beaten, shipwrecked, and imprisoned for the gospel." Yet God used these unplanned circumstances to spread the gospel to the Imperial Guard and encourage believers for centuries to come. Paul's willingness to surrender his plans allowed God to accomplish something far greater than Paul could have imagined. Surrendering our plans doesn't mean becoming passive or irresponsible. It means holding our plans with open hands, ready to adjust when God redirects our path. It means trusting that God's ways are higher than our ways, even when His direction doesn't make sense from our limited perspective. Sometimes God's plan involves detours, delays, or complete direction changes. These moments test our faith and reveal whether we truly trust His sovereignty. When we surrender our plans to God, we position ourselves to experience His perfect timing and discover opportunities we never would have seen on our own predetermined path.

Bible Verse: "Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose. I am torn between the two. I long to depart and be with Christ—which is far better— but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake."- Philippians 1:22-24

Reflection Question: What plans or expectations are you struggling to surrender to God's timing and direction?

Quote: Paul lives his life not for himself, but for God. And that is a powerful example. Even when it's hard, Paul wants to live for God's glory and for God's mission.

Prayer: Father, I place my plans in Your hands. Help me trust Your perfect timing and direction, even when it differs from my expectations.

Day 4

Surrendering Our Desires

Devotional: Our desires often feel like the most personal, untouchable part of who we are. We think, "Surely God doesn't want to change what I want, does He?" But true transformation happens when we allow God to align our desires with His heart. God's greatest desire is that every person would know Him. This means our comfort, convenience, and personal preferences must sometimes take a backseat to His mission. The path of least resistance isn't usually the path of discipleship. Reaching our neighbors, making disciples, and sharing the gospel requires us to step out of our comfort zones and into God's calling. Surrendering our desires doesn't mean God wants to make us miserable. Instead, He wants to give us desires that align with His kingdom purposes - desires that bring lasting fulfillment rather than temporary satisfaction. When our hearts beat in rhythm with His, we discover joy in serving others, peace in His presence, and purpose in His mission. This surrender happens daily, whether we're 8 or 88. Each day brings new opportunities to choose God's desires over our own immediate wants. As we practice this daily surrender, we find that God's desires become our desires, and His joy becomes our strength.

Bible Verse: "Dear friends, don't overlook this one fact: With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance." - 2 Peter 3:8-9

Reflection Question: How might God be calling you to align your desires more closely with His heart for people who don't know Him?

Quote: Every single day, we are called to surrender our desires to God. Whether we are 7 or 8, or 87 or 88, or 107 and 108, every day we are called to surrender our desires to God.

Prayer: Lord, change my heart to desire what You desire. Help me find joy in Your mission and purpose in serving others.

Day 5

Living the Mission

Devotional: After four days of exploring surrender, we arrive at the beautiful purpose behind it all: living for Christ's mission. When we surrender our lives, plans, and desires to God, we don't lose ourselves - we find our true calling as His ambassadors in this world. This world is not our home, and it never will be. We're temporary residents with an eternal purpose: to make disciples and glorify God. This mission gives meaning to every surrender we've made. Our willingness to live for Christ rather than ourselves positions us to be used by God in ways we never imagined. Living the mission isn't always comfortable or easy, but it's incredibly worth it. When we embrace our calling to reach others, serve sacrificially, and point people to Jesus, we experience the joy of partnership with God in His redemptive work. We become part of something infinitely bigger than our individual lives. The race matters, and so does the finish line. We live on earth not for ourselves, but for Jesus. And when we complete our earthly race, having lived for His mission, we'll be united with Him forever. Until that day, we have work to do, people to reach, and a mission to fulfill.

Bible Verse: "But if it doesn't please you to worship the Lord, choose for yourselves today: Which will you worship—the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living? As for me and my family, we will worship the Lord." - Joshua 24:15

Reflection Question: What specific step can you take this week to more actively participate in God's mission to reach others?

Quote: Following God and living out the Great Commission is not and never will be about it being easy or comfortable. But I will promise you this: it is so worth it.

Prayer: God, use my surrendered life for Your mission. Help me live each day with eternal purpose, serving You, whatever the cost.