

The Win-Win Life

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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. 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.
(Phil. 1:19-26)

I'm afraid I must confess that when I was very young, I gambled. I'm relieved to tell you that it wasn't with real money, but with a toy Roulette game my parents had bought my older brother. (I don't recommend buying toy gambling devices for your children.)

So as a five or six year-old, I learnt you could put your chips down on a number and when the wheel was spun, whatever number the little ball landed on, if you were lucky enough, you got lots of chips. But because there were so many numbers, you usually weren't lucky enough. But then I discovered that on each side of the board were two diamond shapes, one black, and one red. All the other numbers on the wheel were either red or black. If you put your chip on black diamond, and any black number came up, you'd get double your chips. Same for red. Suddenly, I saw that my chances of winning were great: you had a one in two chance of winning every time. I did this. Then my five-year old mind figured that if I put a chip on red and a chip on black, I would win every time! And I did! I also lost every time, but I was excited about winning every time. And as I won every time, I crowed and rejoiced, until finally my brother was frustrated enough to point out to me, "Yes, but every round you lose just as much as you win! You're not gaining anything". Well, that burst all my happiness bubbles, because it was true. When you bet on opposites, you win every time, but you lose every time, and they basically cancel each other out.

That's really how many Christians live. They place the chips of their life on the things they think will bring most gain: family, wealth, possessions, status, looks, health. And usually, they place their bets in ways that are like betting on red and black. They put enough stock in the things of this world, but then they also place some chips on Christ and eternity. The problem is, when they are pursuing the things of this world, they aren't pursuing Christ, and it destroys their joy in God. They win and they lose, and it cancels each other out. When you experience the joys and victories of the Christian life, it pulls them away from the things of this world, which they regret, and the win and loss seems to cancel each other out.

This win-lose approach to Christianity is what the Bible calls the double-minded man, the lukewarm. In trying to have it all, he never really gains.

Paul is the alternative to the double-minded man. Paul is the wholehearted Christian. He is the man who has allowed the gospel not only to change his destiny, but to change how he lives now. He has understood the cruciform life, the J-curve. He does not simply believe that Jesus died and rose for Paul, he believes that Paul died and rose with Jesus, and that life is continual dying and rising. But now that this is the case, Paul lives with a win-win life. He is not playing the same old game with the old dilemmas. Instead, Paul has entered into the Can't-Lose life. In these verses Paul will show us his can't lose life in verses 19 to 21. Then, in verses 22-26 he'll turn around and tell us that there is an ironic way that when you embrace the gospel shaped can't lose life, there is also a bittersweet way that you can't win.

I. Paul's Can't-Lose-Life

¹⁹ For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, 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. ²¹ For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.

In verse 18 Paul said that he was rejoicing and would keep rejoicing because of Christ being preached one way or another. Now he turns from outward to inward, and says I also have joy in myself and my own circumstances. Just like Paul could rejoice whether Christ was preached sincerely or whether Christ was preached out of contention, so he says, I have the same kind of win-win situation for myself. It is going to be good, Paul says, no matter how it turns out.

How is that? Well, in this sentence there are a lot of moving parts, a lot of *for's* and *according to's* and *throughs*, and we can get lost in them. So here is where grammar and language comes to the rescue. The main action, the main verb of these three verses, which makes it Paul's main point, are the words **Christ will be magnified in my body**. This is at the heart of why Paul regards his life as win-win. No matter what, Christ is going to be magnified in Paul's body, which simply means in his living person. This is his joy and confidence and hope.

Now let's explain what that means, and then see how all of the moving parts in these sentences connect to that.

Magnified can mean to make something larger than it is. That's how Jesus uses this word about the Pharisees, that they lengthen the tassels of their garments. They enlarge them. You take something small and make it big.

But the second way that *magnified* is used in the NT, means to make something or someone better known or better praised or better loved. You increase the esteem, or the admiration, or the praise of this person or thing. Here you are not enlarging the thing, you are enlarging its visibility. A star is a very big object, but it appears small because it is so far away. So a telescope takes what appears small, and begins to show us something closer to its true size and beauty and glory.

This is how Paul means Christ will be magnified. He doesn't mean Christ is small and needs to be enlarged. He means the person of Jesus is glorious and wondrous and mighty, but appears like a pin-prick to most people. So a Christian's life is one of magnifying the worth and the value and the beauty of Jesus to believers, and to unbelievers. Paul is a lens, and through the living lens of Paul, Christ will be magnified.

How will Paul do this? The answer is in this whole situation, and related to the Philippians' culture. For the Roman Philippians, honour was everything. Your good name, your status, your position in society was everything.

But Paul is in prison, awaiting trial. In Roman society, as in ours, being in prison carries some shame or stigma. This shame for Paul is not a private, psychological shame, but a very public, social kind of shame. At some point, Paul is going to be called out of prison to give an account of his Christianity. Will he be shamed, or ashamed as he testifies of Christ?

Paul has become immune to that. The opposite of being shamed is being magnified, or honoured. He has told us what his life is wrapped up in: magnifying Jesus.

Social standing just has no purchase on Paul's life anymore. Yes, if Paul is found guilty, then from a Roman social point of view, he should be ashamed. But Paul says, the gospel has completely

immersed me into the magnification of Jesus. When I stand at that trial, testifying of Jesus, I have nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary, I will be honoured to be honouring my Lord. In God's sight, I will be vindicated no matter what.

Verse 19 says that the prayers of the Philippians will turn out for his deliverance. When he gives that account, he will either be acquitted by the Romans and set free, which would be one kind of deliverance, or he will be found guilty and will be executed and set free from this life, which will be another kind of deliverance. Either way Paul will be delivered – delivered from prison into more ministry, or delivered from this life into Christ's arms.

That gives him a sense of total confident assurance. “according to my earnest expectation and hope” Paul says, I eagerly expect, I am completely sure that what lies ahead of me is not shame and embarrassment, but happy, bold magnification of Jesus.

But what is the secret of Paul's no-shame, confident, bold Christ-magnifying life?

as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.

As a way of life, as always, so now also, Christ will be magnified in me, in my body, whether by life, or by death. Don't separate verse 21 from verse 20. *For*, here is the explanation of that previous statement: for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

This is the win-win. If I live, Paul says, my living days are about knowing and showing Christ. Every waking breath I get, I get to love my Lord, I get to know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings. My life's joy, my meaning, my purpose is knowing and loving my God.

I have become a man of one purpose in life: knowing and loving God. I live to worship God, to experience and demonstrate why He is my highest treasure. Look at chapter 3, where Paul explains this in clear terms: ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Phil. 3:8)

Philippians 3:8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, (Phil. 3:8)

Paul has found that nothing in life compares to knowing God. None of the gifts of creation: family, friends, food, fame, fortune, power, pleasure brings lasting satisfaction, complete fulfillment, ultimate purpose. If you need proof of that, read the man who experimented with them all, and said they were lighter than air in the end: Solomon in Ecclesiastes.

Paul says, living, for me, is Messiah. Everything I do is of Him, and through Him, and to Him. It is about knowing and showing Him. And so the more time I get, the more I get to do that, which means my life is not one of shame or regret or fear.

When I have my day in court, I will get to preach Christ and magnify Him in my speech and life.

But, Paul says, if I die, if death comes, I will also magnify Christ. But how, Paul? Then you won't be in your body anymore. No, that's true. But, Paul says, when I don't fear death, and death is gain, I magnify the worth of Jesus.

If Paul dies, he goes into the presence of Christ, which he's going to say, is far, far better. If he dies,

he does not just get to know and show Christ here in weakness and frailty, but he gets the unmediated, direct experience of the one he loves and treasures. So if a Roman threatens Paul with death if he does not deny Christ, Paul can only smile at that executioner and say, "You will be doing me a favour!" And when the world sees that not even the loss of life can make Paul abandon Christ, it means Christ is worth more than anything this life can give. Christ is magnified.

If Christ is your life, then dying is gain.

This is what the gospel does. It inverts loss and gain, so that what we feared to lose, we can happily lose, knowing we really gain. We can give up the things of this life, if we gain more of Christ. And the thing we feared to gain, death: we can actually accept, because death no longer robs us, it blesses us, gives to us.

Fill in the blanks: For me to live is __, and to die is ____. For me to live is money, and to die is to leave it all behind. For me to live is fame, and to die is to be forgotten. For me to live is power, and to die is to be defeated. For me to live is health and good looks, and to die is have that destroyed in a moment. For me to live is family, and to die is to break all bonds.

Maltie Babcock the author of "This is my Father's World" said, "Life is what you are alive to!" What are you alive to? What lights up your eyes and fills you with excitement? For Paul, it was Christ, and all things under His lordship.

If we let the gospel immerse us into being wrapped up with Christ, so that living is Him, and dying is gain, what sort of things can we give up if Christ calls us to? What sort of radical service, radical sacrifice can come out of us? We can leave our home and family, and go to another country for the gospel. We can leave livelihood and stable incomes for the gospel. We can serve in ministries that take up time and resources because of the gospel. We can forgo certain luxuries or amenities because we love to see that money go to missions or mercy or ministry. We can take up studies in counseling or preaching or discipling or seminary, because now our deepest joys are in Christ.

When you embrace this life which Paul is modelling, what fears should no longer grip you? Fear of not being rich? Fear of not being known and loved? Fear of missing out on some or other experience? Fear of death? Indeed, hasn't Covid been revealing about fears of death? Of course, none of us wants to die or wants our loved ones to die, and we should do what we can to protect. But when preventing death consumes someone, he has made an idol of life. Paul was free from that. And when death is not a fear, and you are set free to magnify Christ where He wants you, you are the freest person alive.

If there is one fear you should have, it is fear of failing to magnify Christ. Fear of standing before Him with all your unspent money and unspent energy and unspent years, and unspent time. Fear of arriving at the Judgement Seat and saying, "Lord, here are the years and beauty and ability and money and intelligence and influence you gave me, I was careful not to use them, because I didn't know when I was going to die." We remember the lord's reply to the steward who hid his talent.

Before he left for the mission field, Adoniram Judson fell in love with Ann Hasseltine. Knowing that he wanted to marry Ann, but also knowing the hardships that they were sure to face being on the mission field, he wrote Ann's father a letter asking for her hand in marriage with these realities in mind.

"I have now to ask whether you can consent to part with your daughter early next spring, to see her no more in this world? Whether you can consent to her departure to a heathen land, and her

subjection to the hardships and sufferings of a missionary life? Whether you can consent to her exposure to the dangers of the ocean; to the fatal influence of the southern climate of India; to every kind of want and distress; to degradation, insult, persecution, and perhaps a violent death? Can you consent to all this, for the sake of Him who left His heavenly home and died for her and for you; for the sake of perishing, immortal souls; for the sake of Zion and the glory of God? Can you consent to all this, in hope of soon meeting your daughter in the world of glory, with a crown of righteousness brightened by the acclamations of praise which shall resound to her Saviour from heathens saved, through her means, from eternal woe and despair?"

Ann did go through many hardships while on the mission field. She had 3 pregnancies: The first ended in a miscarriage while moving from India to Burma; her second child, Roger, was born in 1815 and died at 8 months of age; her third child, Maria, lived only 6 months after Ann herself died in 1826 of smallpox. Adoniram Judson himself lost 2 wives and 6 of 13 children on the mission field.

Ultimately, their sacrifice was worth it. While Judson only had 18 converts after 12 years, when he died he left 100 churches and over 8,000 believers. Today we can see the fruit of his work since there are 2.5 million evangelical Christians in Burma (modern day Myanmar).

(Source: <https://www.billyreinhardt.com/adoniram-judsons-astonishing-letter-to-his-father-in-law-asking-for-his-daughters-hand-in-marriage/>)

The only way you can do that is when you understand the win-win life of being dead to self and alive to magnifying Christ.

But this win-win, ironically produces a little bit of the opposite, what we call a catch-22.

II. Paul's Catch-22

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. 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.

He just told us that in Christ, he always wins, because he always magnifies Christ. But now Paul tells us that the Christian life is also a minor dilemma. Verse 23 tells you that Paul is squeezed, pressed by two choices. He cannot have both at the same time. When he has the one, he loses the other. He must choose between two J-curves, two deaths and resurrections.

What is that dilemma? In verse 23, Paul says he wants to depart. That is, first prize would actually be if Rome executes him, because then he gets to be with Christ. That, to Paul is far better. In fact, in the Greek, it is three words, a literal translation would be "much more better". I can picture a few Philippians being a little hurt by that. But Paul is not lying. Going to heaven would be joy on an altogether different level. But if he dies, he cannot minister to the Philippians any longer. He cannot help them or grow them or see them grow. His labour and the fruit of his labour will be over.

The other choice is to live on, to be released. That would mean, according to verse 22, more fruit for his labour. It would meet the more immediate need, according to verse 24. The Philippians need Paul's ministry, more than he needs to be released from life and go to heaven. Paul knows that the needs of the hour are to fight the spiritual battles, to labour in the vineyard, and not to simply crave our rest and reward.

This is a bitter-sweet catch-22. It's nothing like the world, or even like the lukewarm Christian, where when you serve one idol, it robs time from another, or when you pursue worldly life, you must avoid death. No, this is pleasing pain: I must either stay and be a blessing to others, or I must go to my reward. I must either earn more rewards, or go and enjoy them now.

Here is the dilemma of a true believer: which victory must I choose? Death to my hopes of going to heaven sooner so that I can experience more usefulness, more fruitfulness, more blessing on others, and more eternal treasure? Or death to this life itself, and experiencing Heaven itself?

So in verse 25 he says he is inwardly convinced that he will actually be released, so that he can assist them in their growth and joy in Christ. Verse 26 is difficult to translate, I think the CSB comes closest when it translates it: so that, because of me, your confidence may grow in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. (Phil. 1:26)

Ultimately, it appears Paul was correct. He was released after his first Roman imprisonment, visited several churches, including the Philippians, until his later second arrest, when he was tried, and beheaded under Nero.

Here is another barometer to test your life by. Do I make my choices based upon maximum usefulness to Christ? Am I asking how my life, with my particular abilities and opportunities can be used most effectively for Him?

Satan does not have to kill most Christians. He just disarms them with fear of losing life. He reminds them that life is finite and slipping away, and you don't want to go and spend it on some wild goose chase, some fool's errand, right? Here, says Satan, place a bet on Christ, and place a bet on this world. That way you're safe.

But if you have died and risen with Christ, then the fear of death should have no hold on you. And therefore the fear of losing life should have no hold on you.

That is, my only dilemma in life is, what will be the most fruitful use of my life and time, before He takes me home? I live for Him, and if I die, it is going to Him. So nothing holds me back from seeking His glory. I don't have two masters to please, and my life and death belongs to Him. So I can then, in the words of Oswald Chambers, Do My Utmost For His Highest.

When you think about it, every human being is a magnifying lens. We are all magnifying the worth of something, showing our friends, family, children, colleagues that we think something is worth great amounts of time, sacrifice, investment. What does the lens of your life right now proclaim to the world? What does it make big? What does it tell others is worthy? Clothes? Cars? Travel? Children? Marriage? Work? Money? Health? Success? Fame?

The way to know is to ask, what will death do to this? If it ends or destroys, then you are magnifying something temporal.

If you have consecrated your family and work and money and career to Christ, then death won't be loss, because all those things have only become means of knowing and showing Him.

The only catch to experiencing the win-win life in Christ is that you cash in all your chips on Christ, and you don't get to keep any. I am not trying to bet on red and black. I have taken all the chips of my life and I have one bet: Christ.