



The Fulfilled Life

Philippians 1:12-30

"For me, living is Christ and dying is gain." ~ Philippians 1:21

In 1952, young Florence Chadwick stepped into the waters of the Pacific Ocean off of Catalina Island, determined to swim to the shore of mainland California. ...the weather was foggy and chilly; she could hardly see the boats accompanying her. Still, she swam for 15hrs. When she begged to be taken out of the water along the way, her mother, in a boat alongside, told her she was close and that she could make it. Finally, physically and emotionally exhausted, she stopped swimming and was pulled out. It wasn't until she was on the boat that she discovered the shore was less than half a mile away. At a news conference the next day she said, "**All I could see was the fog...I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it.**"

~ Heaven by Randy Alcorn

Background (*as you are turning*)

- A letter from prison by the Apostle Paul to a church he began around A.D. 49 (more or less) (10 years ago)
- Philippians is likely writing from a Roman prison around AD 61/62; if from other prisons (Caesarea, etc.) it would be a little earlier.
- Paul is in prison, the Philippians know it (they have sent him financial help—via one of their people), and they were apparently discouraged/distrust about his imprisonment
- Paul encourages the Philippian believers: **the gospel is ADVANCING despite the appearance.**
- **Paul calls these believers and God calls us through Paul today to LIVE WORTHY OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST: NO MATTER WHAT COMES.**

Set your hope fully on God—regardless of the fog and chaos of life.

- (1) "Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." - **1 Peter 1:13**
- (2) **Results of Paul's imprisonment:**
 1. People are hearing about Jesus: **(Philippians 1:12-13)**
 2. Fearless speaking about gospel: **(vs. 14-18)**
- (3) **Summary:** The sure footing in the fog is God Himself. Set your hope fully on God. We cannot always see what God is doing, but in this case, apparent loss was advancing the kingdom of God.
 1. "Joy is the flag over the castle of the heart announcing that the king is in residence."
 - Joy is rooted in trust. It doesn't mean no mourning—the Bible has a book called Lamentations, Jesus mourned, wept over a city, wept at Lazarus's tomb, etc.
 - But we can TRUST GOD still.

Doctor: "Your eye has cancer; we are going to have to remove it." Howard Hendricks looks at his wife and then looks about at the doctor. Hendricks: "Ok, let's do it." The doctor was taken back by how calm they were. Hendricks: "Sir, you are looking at a man who is fulfilled."

Find your fulfillment in Jesus: Paul was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Galatians 2:19-21 (HCSB)

¹⁹ For through the law I have died to the law, so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ ²⁰ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

- (1) **Paul's life purpose became: "I live to highly honor Jesus" (Philippians 1:19-20)**
 1. **WHETHER OR NOT from an earthly court of acquittal.**
 - "Paul faced imprisonment and the threat of death and, from fellow-Christians, animosity and provocation, and yet he was confident that all would turn out well (cf. Rom. 8:28). Humanly speaking he relied on the prayers of his friends, and in answer to them the unfailing help of the Holy Spirit...The assurance of deliverance is of the kind described in 2 Tim. 4:18, 'The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.' Jb. 13:16 (and its context) seems to be in his mind. 'Paul has no confidence in his acquittal by an earthly court. Like Job he is sure of vindication when his case is presented in the heavenly court of appeal'"¹
 2. **Eager Expectation (vs. 20):**
 - "The word translated *eagerly expect* means straining forward with outstretched head, and its prepositional prefix implies a turning aside from all other interests. Paul has one supreme ambition: that Christ might be exalted in his body, living or dying; that Christ might be seen by others more clearly and in his true greatness."¹

¹ Francis Foulkes, "Philippians," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1251.

(2) **Paul's Outlook: Living is Christ; Dying is gain**

1. **Living is Christ (vs. 21a)**

- "If he lived, he lived to know more of Christ, studying His person, and learning by his happy experience so that he increased in his knowledge of his Lord and Savior. If he lived, he lived to imitate Christ more closely, becoming more and more conformed to His image. If he lived, he lived to make Christ more and more known to others, and to enjoy Christ more himself. In these four senses, he might well say, "For to me to live is Christ"—to know Christ more, to imitate Christ more, to preach Christ more, and to enjoy Christ more.² ~ **Spurgeon**

2. **Dying is gain (vs. 21b)**

- (Same letter later a little later)
²⁰ but our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself. (**Philippians 3:20-21**)
 - Airport after I returned from Costa Rica (USA smells like A/C)
- **"I would not give one moment of heaven for all the joy and riches of the world, even if it lasted for thousands and thousands of years."** ~ **Martin Luther**
 - "For the Christian, heaven is where Jesus is. We do not need to speculate on what heaven will be like. It is enough to know that we will be forever with Him." ~William Barclay

(3) **Competing Desires (both good): (vs. 22-26)**

1. Longing to be with the Lord (vs. 23)
2. Desire to strengthen the people of God; Paul expects this role. (vs. 24-26)



Have you met Christians whose lives strongly point you to Jesus? Who? How so?

If you are a Christian, what does your life say about Jesus?

Consider this question in light of Paul's life:

How does Paul's fulfillment in Jesus compare with other places that most people seek purpose, identity, value, and hope?

- (1) purpose (what is my purpose in life),
- (2) identity (who am I),
- (3) value (why am I valuable),
- (4) hope (what happens when I die? What happens when others die?)

² Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon Commentary: Philippians*, ed. Elliot Ritzema, Spurgeon Commentary Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 25.

Live worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

Gospel: God demonstrates His own love in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of ourselves..”

(1) Live in a MANNER worthy of the gospel of Christ. (vs. 27a)

1. “In all ages—and not least today—the greatest hindrance to the advance of the gospel has been the inconsistency of Christians. The gospel has its greatest influence when the lives of Christians commend it, and that gives us our special responsibility... In Philippi... Roman citizenship was prized, but the Philippian Christians had the responsibility to live individually and corporately as heavenly citizens (cf. 3:20).³

(2) Live together for the gospel: One spirit, one mind, side by side, for the faith. (vs. 27b)

- i. The saints embraced a common cause, for they each shared in the same body of Christ. Therefore Paul was burdened that they **stand firm** (cf. Phil. 4:1) **in one spirit** and contend **as one man** (lit., “in one soul”) **for the faith of the gospel**, the body of truth (cf. “faith,” Jude 3). Their **contending** (*synalthetautes*) for the faith suggests a joint effort, like that of an athletic team.⁴

(3) Follow me as I follow Christ: Paul modeled how to follow Christ, even in persecution.

1. There is both privilege and responsibility in knowing Jesus—even in persecution. (vs. 29-30, cf. 14-17)
 - i. Reliance on the power of God is the way to avoid being frightened by those who oppose them. The word used here is used of startled horses; ‘never be scared’ is Moffatt’s translation. Their fearlessness, moreover, will show their enemies that Christians are not fortified by merely human courage, and so to oppose them is to fight against God (cf. Acts 5:39) and to take the path that leads to destruction (cf. 2 Thes. 1:4–8). Perhaps as he wrote, Paul recalled the voice of God in his own conscience indicating this when he persecuted the Christians (Acts 26:10–14). At the same time, the evident presence of God with them will assure the Philippians themselves that they are God’s and blessed with his salvation.⁵

(4) “**Don’t ever give up in freedom what we would never have given up in persecution! That is our witness to the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!**” –Full account below.

Summary:

- (1) Set your hope fully on God—regardless of the fog/chaos of your life.
- (2) Find your fulfillment in Jesus Christ.
- (3) Live worthy of the gospel of Christ, no matter what comes
 - i. **My grace is sufficient—my power is made perfect in weakness (dependence).**

For me first, then you:

To Go:

1. What does the Lord want you to do in response to His word?
2. How are you challenged by Paul’s letter to the Philippians? How are you encouraged?
3. What internal pressures –common to everyone—are satisfied by knowing and following Jesus Christ?

To act on:

1. If you are not a Christian: Is there anything that is keeping you from trusting and identifying with Jesus as Savior and King?
2. If you are a Christian: Is there anything in your life that is challenging the Lord Jesus for supremacy?

³ Francis Foulkes, “Philippians,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1252.

⁴ Robert P. Lightner, “Philippians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 652.

⁵ Francis Foulkes, “Philippians,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1252.

The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected **Refusing to be Silenced from *The Insanity of God* (see below)**

I will call my next storyteller Stoyan. The name means “stand firm” or “stay,” and it is a common Eastern European name. Stoyan was about sixty years old, energetic and friendly. We met in the capital city of his country. After my usual explanation of who I was and what I was doing, Stoyan began telling me his story. He began by talking about his parents. After the end of World War II, the communists began consolidating their power throughout his country. Eventually, they took control of the government. For decades, the authorities oppressed believers. When Stoyan was twelve, they imprisoned his protestant pastor father. His father remained in custody for ten years. “At first,” he said, “they held him in a secret police place in our city.” “Every morning one of the guards would take some of his own human waste and spread it on the piece of toast that he brought to my father for breakfast.” Stoyan reported that the emotional and psychological impact of this persecution was even worse, and left deeper scars, than any physical mistreatment. Nine discouraging months passed with no word about his father. Stoyan’s mother finally received notification that her husband was being transferred, with a group of other prisoners, to a distant labor camp. The jailers allowed the families a one-hour visit before the transfer. Stoyan and his mother went to the well-known torture facility of the secret police on their assigned day. They were ushered out onto a football-sized field along with many other families who had come to see their beloved husbands and fathers and sons. “Most of the prisoners rushed out to talk with their relatives from the other side of a long row of tables lined up to separate visitors from the inmates,” Stoyan recalled. “But my father did not appear. My mother and I sat and waited. We waited for a long time. Finally, when our hour of visitation was almost up, another prisoner, evidently a trustee, walked through the visiting room door carrying what looked like a bundle of rags. He strode toward us and laid that bundle on top of one of the tables.” “My mother took my hand,” recalled Stoyan, “and together we walked up to the table where, only because of the piercing blue eyes staring out at me from those rags, did I recognize this skeletal figure of a man as my father.” “I took my father’s hand in mine and I put my face close to his. I whispered, ‘Papa, I am so proud of you!’ I was thirteen years old.” “Mama knew what my father would want most, so she slipped a little pocket New Testament under his wool cap. The jailer saw what she had done. He rushed over and took the little book, and then he summoned his commander. The officer took one look at the book before furiously throwing it to the ground. He screamed at my mother, with a great crowd of people around us, ‘Woman, don’t you realize that it is because of this book and because of your God that your husband is here? I can kill him, I can kill you, and I can kill your son. And I would be applauded for it!’” Stoyan was remembering something that had happened decades earlier. But he recited the words as if they had been spoken yesterday. “My mother looked at that prison officer and said, ‘Sir, you are right. You can kill my husband. You can kill me. I know that you can even kill our son. But nothing you can do will separate us from the love that is in Jesus Christ!’” Stoyan said, “I was so proud of my mama!” After the communist government had transferred his pastor father to the gulag outside of the city, the authorities exiled the rest of Stoyan’s family to a remote gypsy village in a distant corner of the country. The police knocked on the door late one night and gave Stoyan, his mother and his three younger brothers an hour to pack. They were allowed to take two suitcases each. They were loaded on a midnight train bound for a place that they had never been. At some point on that lonely train-ride, frightened and feeling like they had lost everything, Stoyan’s younger siblings began to cry. They pleaded with their mother: “What’s going to happen to our house? Mama, where are we going to live now? How will Papa know where we are? What are we going to do? What’s going to happen to us?” Stoyan’s mother had no answers for her traumatized family. All she could do to reassure them was to say: “God will have to provide, little ones.” Then she led them in singing a hymn. After they finished singing, as the train drew near its destination, a

stranger approached the fearful family huddled together and spoke to the mother: “Are you the family of the pastor who has been imprisoned?” (As he asked the question, he referred to the pastor by name.) “Yes, we are,” she told him. The man said, “Our church was meeting last night. During our prayers, the Holy Spirit told us to take up an offering, and for me to bring it on this train, to give it to you, and to escort your family to your new home.” He handed her a small cloth bag and lowered his voice to say, “Here’s enough money for six months. We will bring more when this runs out.”

Over the remaining years of his father’s imprisonment, Stoyan’s family was allowed two visits. Each visit was for one hour each time. Somehow, the pastor and his family managed to survive. It wasn’t easy for any of them. Three times a day, Stoyan was required to report to the local police station. In 1955, the communist authorities expelled him from the university. Stoyan’s father, like every evangelical pastor that the government had imprisoned, had been accused of being an American or British spy. Stoyan’s father was called “a political prisoner.” Because of his family connection, the secret police stamped “Enemy of the Republic” on Stoyan’s university record, and declared him ineligible to graduate. He was then conscripted into military service. There, he received no promotions and was allowed to do only menial work in a supply unit. More than ten thousand “political prisoners” died in Stoyan’s country during those years. There was little hope that his father would survive his ordeal. Near the end, his guards made one last cruel attempt to break him. They informed the pastor that he was scheduled for execution. They took him outside, tied him to a pole, and offered him one last opportunity to deny his faith. If he would not deny his faith, they told him, he would be shot. He straightened his back, stood tall and declared, “I will not deny Christ.” The guards became furious with him. Evidently, they did not have the authority to carry out their threat of execution. And, evidently, they had actually been given very different orders. They continued to insult and curse him even as they began to untie him. Then, much to his surprise, instead of escorting him back to his cell, they took him to the prison wall, unlocked a gate, opened a door and literally threw him out of prison without a word of explanation. He was so shocked by what had just happened that he didn’t know what to do. It finally dawned on him that he had been released. He began to walk. Much later, he found his way to his family’s new home. It was a Saturday when he arrived, and no one was home. He then found the church and discovered his family and other church members praying for him at the altar. After a joyous reunion, he was finally able to preach again. One Sunday, a few months later, an elderly woman asked the pastor for help. He did not know her. She told the pastor that she had a diabetic son— a son who had recently gone blind and was now close to death. He needed medication to manage his agonizing pain. Unfortunately, as a believer, there was no way for her to get that medicine for her son. Stoyan’s father promised to try to help acquire the medication. And eventually he was able to do that. When he took the medicine to the old woman’s apartment, she led him into the bedroom to introduce the pastor to her son. She was grateful for the medicine, and she wanted the pastor to pray for her son. When Stoyan’s father entered the room, he got the shock of his life. The blind, invalid, middle-aged man lying helpless in the bed before him was the prison guard who had spread human waste on the pastor’s breakfast toast every morning for the first nine months of his imprisonment. “Oh, Lord! Do not let me fail you now!” Stoyan’s father prayed beneath his breath. Without identifying himself or saying anything that might give away the connection, the pastor granted his former tormenter forgiveness in his own heart, helped the old woman administer the medicine to relieve the man’s pain, prayed for her son, and then returned home awed by a new and deeper understanding of God’s grace. In fact, he was so overwhelmed by God’s grace that the experience changed his life and the lives of his family members.

Despite decades of extreme hardship, Stoyan's stories were joyful and hopeful. He was convinced that people flocked to Christ in greater numbers during difficult days of persecution because that's when they could recognize how God sustains and strengthens His followers through times of trouble. He said that he had learned that family is the believer's greatest reservoir of faith and resistance in the face of persecution. And he explained that, surprisingly, freedom had brought a new set of challenges that had blurred spiritual battle lines. As my interview with Stoyan drew to a close, I knew that it was going to take a long time to process the wisdom, insights and conclusions that this one man had drawn from his life-treasure of faith experience. When I mentioned that to Stoyan, and thanked him for his time, he smiled modestly and replied, "I thank God and I take great joy in knowing that I was suffering in prison in my country, so that you, Nik, could be free to share Jesus in Kentucky." Those words pierced my soul. I looked Stoyan straight in the eyes. "Oh, no!" I protested. "No! You are not going to do that! You are NOT going to put that on me. That is a debt so large that I can never repay you!" Stoyan stared right back at me and said, "Son, that's the debt of the cross!" He leaned forward and poked me in the chest with his finger as he continued, "Don't you steal my joy! I took great joy that I was suffering in my country, so that you could be free to witness in your country." Then he raised his voice in a prophet-like challenge that I knew would live with me forever: "**Don't ever give up in freedom what we would never have given up in persecution! That is our witness to the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!**"