

# [ trophy life ]

:: philippians 1.22-26 ::

Philippians 1.22-26 - But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

The Christian life is centered on the filling and the direction of the Holy Spirit. That is the bottom line.

**Zechariah 4.6b - 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts.**

However, our *acceptance* of the Holy Spirit's power and directives in our lives is up to us.

Whether it's the parable of the virgins trimming their wicks, the parable of the talents or the 2 sons commissioned to work in their father's vineyard...even the example of John Mark in the book of Acts, we find that your decisions are up to you. Your participation in God's will is up to you. Your reception of the Holy Spirit's power and presence in your life is up to you. God does not **force** us into submission or labor or reward.

This is why we're reminded so often in the Bible that we must purpose in our hearts to stay the course. To compete. To run the race. To trim the wicks. To keep oil in our lamps. Because naturally, we are **not** going to finish well. Naturally, in our human hearts, we are not going to stay stirred, but we're going to settle.

This is why Paul exhorted the Philippians to think about their spiritual lives. He challenged them to live life with the mindset of a runner, competing for a prize. His desire was to awaken the understanding that spiritual power and spiritual purpose and spiritual fruit was available and ready to be enjoyed by **every** Christian.

Here in the West, we have not been forced underground as Christians. We're not facing martyrdom or severe persecution. Because of the physical blessings we've received, we are prone to settling and stagnation and indifference in our walk with the Lord. That's just the deal. It happened to the Israelites, it's happened throughout history, it happens to us.

One way to stay motivated in our Christianity is found here in our text. It's reflection and alteration. Paul demonstrates it to us as he works through the situation he found himself in. And, we'll find that it is in keeping with the analogy that Paul often used of believers being like athletes in competition.

He begins this section and says:

**Philippians 1.22-23 - But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better.**

Personal reflection, personal examination is absolutely essential in our lives. When we fail to examine then we will miss areas of weakness which are vulnerable to temptation. We'll miss areas of hardness, where we're turning discompassionate and unforgiving. We'll miss areas of pride and legalism and self-righteousness.

The Scriptures give us some wonderful examples of men who were habitual self-examiners. David in the Psalms, Nehemiah after the fall of Jerusalem, Paul throughout his writings. Men who understood how important it is to pause and look within so that they could hear what the Spirit had to say about them. Paul was doing some thinking out loud about his walk and his desires here in these verses.

This isn't an unusual exercise. Think about athletes. They film their performances and even sometimes their practices, either as a team or as individuals, and then go back and study what they recorded. They study the form. They study the movements. They study mentality. They study their opponents. They pour over a few seconds of film again and again and again, **why?** So that they can improve upon what is currently their personal best in hopes that they will better themselves.

Paul shows us how to take this mentality of self-examination and apply it to our Christian life.

First, we need to stop and evaluate our desires.

Paul says openly that he was hard-pressed between 2 desires: To stay and minister to the Church or to enter into eternity and forever be with the Lord.

We need to spend time reflecting on heaven. On our eternity with Jesus Christ. We can't forget about it. We need to think about the fact that we are just moments away from exiting this life and entering into something far better. And as we think about that and see it in the Word, we discover that we are able to store up treasures there that will await us. We're able to do things here that warrant reward there. We're able to influence others so that *they too* could be given access to everlasting life.

Reflection on heaven will alter our thinking about this life, it will help to iron out our priorities and it will focus us on accomplishing something on this side. An athlete trains so that they might achieve. Yes, there's a love for the game, which is necessary, but they're focused on that championship. They're focused on that ring, that pennant, that medal, that number and they want to lay hold of it.

The Christian life is not meant to be aimless. We should have a healthy morbidity where we *look forward* to our departure from the fallen world and our entrance into the presence of God.

Do we have a desire for heaven? Do we have a desire to accomplish heavenly things here on earth? We should reflect on that today.

But Paul also reflected on his desire to minister to the people around him. In this way, Paul was a team player. He understood that he could, of course, help people become children of God, but he also understood that he could assist other believers in their lives and their fruitfulness.

That's why he says in verse 24:

### **Philippians 1.24 - Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.**

Staying in the will of God means serving and edifying others. Spiritual isolation is outside of the will of God. Selfishness is outside the will of God. So, if I want to stay *in* the will of God, I need to regularly evaluate if I have a desire to serve others.

Again, it's about reflection and alteration. As I think about the fact that my life is a vapor and heaven is waiting for me, maybe just a few hours or days from now, then my mindset should be powerfully altered. "Ok, I'm moments away from eternal rest and bliss, so what does *THIS* other person need right now? How can I help them? How can I love them? How can I be Jesus to them?"

Is there desire for heaven in my day to day life? Is there desire for others? If not, why not?

Now, desire is one thing. Activity is another. Paul was an *active* disciple. And evaluating our activity is also essential so that we're not saying one thing and living another. So that we're not succumbing to hypocrisy in our lives.

### **Philippians 1.25-26 - And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.**

Continuation. Progress. Are we moving forward in our relationship with God? Are we deepening our intimacy with Him? Are we stepping out, stepping forward in new service, new ministry, new ventures of faith? Are we overcoming sins? Can we look around at our lives and our friends and say (not in pride but in observation), "I have built up my brothers and sisters, and here's how"? Using the athletic analogy, are we improving our personal best?

Paul was dedicated to reflection and alteration because he knew that instinctually, naturally, we are carnal. And carnality is enmity with God. Naturally, we are not going to build up others, we're going to hoard for ourselves. Naturally we're not going to draw nearer to God, we're going to pull away from Him. Naturally we're going to settle and stagnate and harden. And so Paul taught, throughout his letters, how important it is to pause and evaluate our lives so that the Spirit can train us so that we become more effective in this life. Naturally, we fall back into sinfulness. So, we have to train ourselves by the Word and by the Spirit, so that when the time of temptation comes, or the time of opportunity or testing or service comes, we will fall back on the supernatural training we've received. So that we fall back on heavenly desires, not worldly ones. So that we fall back on heavenly reactions, not natural ones. So that our lives are about progress, not regress. So that our entrance into eternity will be a moment of triumph and accomplishment, not disappointment or early retirement. Frankly speaking, I want to live this life so that I receive the winner's trophy at the end of the race, not the purple participant ribbon.

Paul took time to evaluate his situation, his desires, his activities, and, in light of heaven, he was able to focus his efforts on spiritually bettering himself and the people around him.

I'm terribly unathletic. Was never much of a sports guy. However, in college I discovered that I really enjoyed swimming. I also discovered that my general lankiness contributed to being a decent swimmer. So, for a year I was in Fresno Pacific's swim club. It was just me and one other guy.

One of the things I like about swimming is that it's all about personal best. As opposed to footraces or team sports, you don't see your opponent while you race. Instead, it's all about pushing past your own personal best. You're racing yourself. Trying to better your time. To that end, swimmers are willing to fiercely prepare themselves, even down to shaving their entire body so that they can eliminate the the smallest amount of drag that would slow them down in the water.

I remember watching film of my swimming form and being able to see those areas where I needed more control in my stroke. Things I couldn't feel when I was in the water, but could see when I examined the tape.

If we want progress and fruitfulness, we **must** pause to reflect and alter those areas which would slow us or distract us or alter our course. As we examine, our faithful trainer, the Holy Spirit, will direct us how we can improve and push past our personal best.

This was what Paul did and it's what we can do today.