

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PAUL

PHILIPPIANS 1:20-21

We all have heroes. People we admire and respect. People we'd love to emulate. We wish we had their talents, and abilities, and genius, and perseverance.

I have a number of heroes... [John Wayne](#) is a hero. [Winston Churchill](#) is a hero. While growing up, [Sandy Koufax](#) and [Johnny Unitas](#) were two of my heroes.

[Billy Graham](#) and [Chuck Smith](#) are my heroes.

In a lot of ways [my dad](#) will always be my hero.

But the number one hero in my life is Christianity's greatest apostle. His name was [Paul](#). Every time I study Paul's life and exploits I get pumped - excited.

And after spending the last two weeks walking in his footsteps, I can't help but talk about him today!

If ever there was a life lived to the fullest it was the life of Paul. Here was a man who burned for Jesus.

In terms of physique Paul was not much. He may've been a *super-heavyweight* spiritually, but physically he was a *featherweight*. Paul was a physical pipsqueak.

Tradition tells us he was barely 5 feet tall.

There's a 3rd century novel titled, "[The Acts of Paul and Thecla](#)" that describe Paul's appearance. "He was small in size with meeting eyebrows, with a rather large nose, bald-headed, bow-legged, strongly built..."

The man was short and thick. His eyebrows looked like a caterpillar crawling across his forehead. But the description

finishes, “full of grace, for at times he looked like a man and at times he had the face of an angel.” As to physical stature Paul was a *gnat*, but when he was measured spiritually he was a *giant*!

Here was a man who lived long before the age of jet planes - long before the days of radio, TV, satellite broadcasts, even the internet. Paul logged most of his frequent flyer miles on foot... *We spent two weeks on bus, plane, foot, and boat tracing the man's steps!*

Paul had none of the modern transportation we had, yet he took the Gospel to the whole known world of his day... *and still found the time to write half the NT.*

And realize his success came despite enormous persecution. Paul encountered difficulty and discrimination almost everywhere he went. In 2 Corinthians 11:24–28 he lists his sufferings for Christ...

“From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” *And you think you had a bad day!*

We moan and groan and think we're martyrs when we're laughed at work or school for reading our Bible.

Paul's life makes ours look like a bed of roses; *yet he counted it an honor to be persecuted for Jesus' sake!*

For more than 30 years Paul faithfully preached the Gospel - and he departed this earth with no regrets.

On the eve of his graduation to heaven he wrote to his sidekick Timothy... "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness."

And Paul not only preached Christianity, he lived His life for Jesus. Paul practiced what he preached.

In Philippians 4:9 he makes a statement that astounds me whenever I read it... "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you."

Do you realize what this man is saying? "*Do what I do and you can be confident that the holy God will be with you.*" Can you make that statement?

Maybe at church, while you're on your best behavior. When you're minding your spiritual manners - but what about when you first wake up... or at 6 AM on Monday in rush hour traffic? Or when a friend stabs you in the back? Or a coworker cops an attitude? Or your wife starts to nag? Or you're handed a pink slip?

Right then, right there - can you say, "*Do what I do, say what I say, and the God of peace will be with you?*"

Well, Paul could. I'm telling you, if God's Spirit hadn't placed Paul's statement in Scripture I wouldn't have believed him. I would've accuse him of being arrogant!

People say a man's greatest compliments come from his enemies... This was also true of Paul.

In Acts 17:6, in the Macedonian town of Thessaloniki, *not far from where we spent the night*, an enemy of the Gospel, referred to Paul and his pals, as "these (men) who have turned the world upside down."

The very men, who wanted to stamp out the Gospel, acknowledge the worldwide impact of Paul's ministry.

In Ephesus, another place we visited, Acts 19 tells the story of the seven sons of Sceva. These were Jewish exorcists who had witnessed Paul confronting the paganism of a region that was full of the occult.

Paul was casting out demons in Jesus' name. These Jews were trying to mimic Paul's miracles, but when they put their hand to casting out a demon, he spoke out, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?"

The demon-possessed man attacked them, brutalized them, beat the living daylights out them, and they barely escaped with their lives. It was ugly - awful.

Back when I played football in High School there was one sure way you knew if you were any good... *if the other team knew your number*. If you were known in the opponent's locker room you were tough stuff.

You knew that you were a threat when the other team knew your name. And this was true of Paul.

What was amazing about Paul is not only was he known in heaven - you would expect that - but he was also known in hell. The demon said, "**Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?**" Paul wasn't just known in the halls of heaven, but in the gates of hell.

Paul's life was anything but boring. It was a spiritual adventure! Paul was a pioneer - an overcomer. His life was full of passion and power... And he owed it all to **an eight word philosophy** by which he lived his life.

Paul's life was propelled by *a motivating motto*.

Eight words made him tick - spurred him on - lifted him up. He had a philosophy that kept him in its grip.

Today, I want to share with you **Paul's eight-word philosophy**... but before I do I want us to get up-close and personal. I want us to check out this guy in action. Before we're done I hope Paul will be your hero too.

Turn first to **Acts 14...**

Paul is on his first missionary journey. He and Barnabas are traveling through the region of Galatia.

We were a little west of Galatia, but we got the lay of the land... Galatia is a mountainous region which was occupied by backwoods and superstitious people.

Throughout the region Paul was opposed by Jews. The conflict came to a head in the town of Lystra.

When Paul and Barnabas entered the city gates they saw a lame man. Paul discerned that he had faith to be healed. He tells the guy to stand up! Just that simple...

But suddenly the guy not only stands, he starts leaping and walking. It's a miracle. The pagan people of Lystra think they've been visited by Greek gods.

Since Paul was doing all the talking they call him Hermes, *the messenger* - and Barnabas, they called Zeus. The pagans try to offer them sacrifices, but Paul stops them, and preaches the Good News of Jesus.

While all this is happening, Jews who'd opposed Paul in the previous towns arrive in Lystra, and mingle with the crowd. While Paul is preaching, his enemies are somehow able to turn the crowd against Paul.

The Jews stirred up the people into a frenzied mob.

One moment they wanted to *sacrifice to Paul* - the next, they want to *make him the sacrifice*. They stone Paul with rocks until they think he's dead. His sidekicks drag his body out of town. Years later, Paul writes to the Galatians about the scars he bore in his body for Jesus' sake. He was referring to this stoning at Lystra.

Picture Paul's pals huddled around him weeping and mourning for their partner in ministry. They're making funeral arrangements... One guy *sizes Paul for a new suit*. *Someone takes his wallet and looks for a number so they can notify the next of kin*. *Another guy checks his driver's license to see if he's an organ donor*.

When suddenly we're told in verse 20, "However, when the disciples gather around him, he rose up and went into the city." Imagine! what they thought was a corpse rises to his feet, rights himself, wipes off the blood and dust, and announces that he's going back into the city to finish his sermon! Wow! What courage!

If I'd been there, I'm thinking, "Come on Paul it's time to move on. You're not exactly welcome here..." But Paul won't hear of it! He's got a message to deliver!

Here's a man who shows perseverance in the face of persecution. He's fearless. A believer with a backbone.

Paul didn't expect to get patted on the back for being a Christian. He was living for Jesus in the same world that Jesus lived - and they didn't pat Jesus on the back. Persecution was no surprise to Paul, and when it came he counted it an honor to suffer for Jesus' sake.

Later in the same chapter when he passes back through Lystra he tells the disciples in verse 22, "we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." You can be sure they listened to his every word!

Long before he got to the point of persecution - *in advance* - Paul settled it in his mind, to stand for Jesus regardless of the cost. Paul was ready for action.

He reminds me of James Calvert, missionary to the Fiji Islands. On Calvert's first trip his ship captain was nervous about his venture. The captain realized the dangers facing him. Door-to-door witnessing among man-eating cannibals is

not the safest thing to do. *When they invite you for dinner* - it's not a good sign.

He told Calvert, "You can't just walk in among these savages - you'll lose your life." James Calvert replied, "*We died before we came.*" Paul had that attitude.

Perseverance in the face of persecution - we all need this kind of courage. No matter how the world stands in my way - no matter if they put me down - no matter if they threaten my life - I won't back down from being what God wants me to be, and doing what He wants me to do... *Do you have Paul's perseverance?*

I believe if Jesus delays His coming, the cost of living the Christian life will rise significantly. Hopefully, none of us will be asked to die a martyr's death, but other forms of persecution may be ahead... Let's be ready...

And we can be ready... if we adopt *an eight word philosophy*. But before I reveal Paul's philosophy, I want us to look at another episode from Paul's life...

Turn to **Acts 16...**

Paul is now on his second missionary journey. This time his sidekick is *Silas*, and they've sailed to the city of Philippi. They start a church, and deliver a slave girl from a demon - but again they run into persecution...

Someone trumps up charges against them and brings them before the town magistrates. The trial is fixed, and Paul and Silas are sentenced to a beating with rods. This was a severe Roman punishment.

The victims were stripped of their clothes and hit across the back and buttocks with a bamboo cane. *We were right where it all happened.* Paul and Silas was thrown in the town jail, and locked in the stocks.

Usually the prison in towns like Philippi were in the basement of the jailor's house. They were cold, dark, damp, rat infested. The prisoners were chained with iron shackles designed to stretch their extremities and cause unbearable pain. *Now here is Paul and Silas...*

Remember, all they've done is start a church and free a slave girl - yet they're in excruciating pain.

Their backs are pulsating and bleeding... They're hanging from iron chains... Their lacerated backs are rubbing up against the cold, stone wall... Hungry rats are nibbling at their toes... There's no rescue in sight...

I'd be complaining, "God, what did I do to deserve all this?" "All I did was preach your Word... Lord, where are you?" "*I thought You loved me?*"

But look at the reaction of Paul and Silas. I'm not making this up, read verse 25, "But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." They're in *searing pain*, yet they're *singing praise!*

We've seen Paul's *perseverance*, but here's a **peace in the midst of the worst pain.** These men are so tuned in spiritually, so latched on to their blessings in Christ - the physical pain really doesn't matter to them.

The *change in their circumstances* hasn't altered the *joy in their hearts...* And let me ask you, *how susceptible are you to changing circumstances?*

The sad truth is that most of us live in bondage to our surroundings. As long as our situation goes well we feel great, but the moment troubles strike - the moment we're forced to deal with anything unpleasant, or inconvenient, or bothersome - we get bummed.

We forget the joy we have in Jesus!

I can promise you one thing - **life won't always go the way you want.** Folks will let you down. Bad things do happen to good people. Life can be cold and cruel.

God uses our fallen world and the suffering it produces to grow us spiritually. CS Lewis once said, "**God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, and shouts to us in our pain.**" It's in the toughest times that God speaks the loudest.

You can't always control your circumstances, but you can control how you react to those circumstances. You can trust God despite your circumstances!

The one thing God does promise us is *His peace even in the midst of our pain.* During our time at Philippi we read Paul's command to the Philippians, "**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say rejoice!**"

With Donna Chapman's insistence we even sang it!

Hey, I like to define the word "*rejoice*" - "*to take joy.*" Sometimes joy doesn't just fall in our lap, we have to reach up through the midst of painful circumstances and take our joy

from God Himself. When we do He fills our hearts with an indescribable peace.

And the key to experiencing this peace is *an eight-word philosophy* by which Paul lived his life. I want to explain Paul's secret, but first here's more from his life!

Turn to **Acts 21...**

After Paul's third missionary journey he returned to Jerusalem to fulfill a life-long dream. *He wanted to preach to his fellow Jews...* He'd taken a vow - hoping respect for the Law would win a hearing in the Temple.

But as soon as Paul shows his face in the Temple, the place erupts. The angry Jews turned into a lynching mob, and stormed Paul. They drag him out of the Temple to stone him... beating him as they go...

The Roman troops on guard at the north end of the Temple hear the ruckus, and go to squelch the uproar.

They rescue Paul, and take him to headquarters, the Fortress of Antonio. They're saving Paul from an angry mob. You'd think Paul would be glad to get to safety. He'd be happy that finally the fortress walls were between him and the bloodthirsty mob, but not so!

His own safety is last on his list of priorities. Paul came to preach Jesus! We're told in verse 40, **"Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. and when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in Hebrew, 'Men, brethren, and fathers, hear my defense before you now..."** He gives his testimony.

Here was a man who held onto his **purpose while others would've panicked**. Paul refuses to lose focus.

He didn't forget why he had come to Jerusalem. He came to the Temple that day to preach the Gospel, and he wasn't going to let a little riot stop him!

The problem with many of us is that we start with good intentions, until we feel the pressure. *When the heat gets applied - when life gets hectic - we panic!*

We leave church excited about living for Jesus - but when Monday rolls around we get distracted. Our good intentions are forgotten. We lose focus and purpose.

But Paul didn't allow fear, or worry, or uncertainty, or selfish interests to obscure his vision. He never lost sight of his calling, and its eternal prize.

It reminds me of Aldin Straight. Aldin lived in Iowa at the time. He was 73 years old. His eyes were bad, so he couldn't get a driver's license, but no matter.

When he heard his brother was sick he was so determined to be by his side, he jumped on his lawnmower and drove 240 miles across Iowa to be with his friend. That's commitment! That's not just good intentions, but determination and follow through.

And how do you develop that kind of determination? Well, there's an eight-word philosophy by which Paul lived his life... but first, there's one more episode...

Let's turn to **Acts 28...**

Chapter 28 opens with Paul recovering from a cruise gone sour. His ship should've winter on the island of Crete. *The same island our cruise ship spent the night.*

But rather than dock at Crete, the ship Paul was on set sail in in-climate weather. For 14 days and nights a violent storm drove the ship 645 miles off-course.

It eventually sunk off the coast of Malta. Yet through God's miraculous intervention, and Paul's careful instructions, the ship's passengers and crew - all 276 of them - reached the Maltese shore safely.

Imagine Paul, for two weeks he was fighting for his life at sea. *I know a little bit about this.* I caught a bug on our cruise and spent a night hovering over the toilet.

Like Paul, I woke up weak as water. My legs felt like rubber. A fight at sea renders you totally exhausted.

Paul was still recoiling and recovering from his ordeal when we're told in verse 3, that he was gathering firewood. **"But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire..."** Notice, Paul is being **persistent even when he's pooped.**

The day after my ordeal I came out of the cabin only for some fresh air and a soda. The last thing I was worried about was building a fire to help everyone else.

I was hoping everyone else would minister to me...

But not Paul, **he's a servant.** He thought, **"I'll have all eternity to be comfortable. I've only got a short time to see to it that I'll have plenty of company in heaven."**

And as Paul gathers sticks a poisonous viper latches on to his hand. The locals saw it and gasped.

They expected Paul to drop over dead - and when he survived they considered it a miracle. Imagine the opportunity this provided Paul to share the Gospel.

But it all started when Paul chose to be a servant, even when he was exhausted. His own limitations didn't slow Paul down due to **an eight word philosophy**.

How do you stop a man like Paul? The answer is, you don't! His faith was *unquenchable*. His witness was *undeniable*. His stand was *unshakeable*...

And it was all because of **an eight-word philosophy** by which Paul lived his life... And to uncover that philosophy let's turn in our Bibles to **Philippians 1**...

Let's add it up, **perseverance in the face of persecution - peace in the worst pain - purpose while others panic - persistence even when you're pooped**...

This is the way Paul lived and it was due to **an eight-word philosophy!** It's in two verses 20-21 Philippians 1.

Paul writes, **"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."**

And here it is... drumroll please... **"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."** Here are eight powerful words... **to live is Christ, to die is gain!**

Paul's supreme desire was not to live *or* die - or anything in between. The burning issue in his life was not *his goals, his comfort, his status, his future*. Paul's utmost desire was that Jesus Christ be magnified in his life. If that meant living, fine. If it meant dying, so be it.

His only concern was for Jesus to be glorified.

On the last day of our trip, in the ruins of ancient Philippi we were privileged to stand on the floor of one of the very first church buildings ever erected.

The octagonal floor dated back to 340 AD.

Prior to that time churches met in homes. But when Constantine embraced Christianity believers across the empire started to meet openly and publicly. And apparently, those in Philippi were particularly bold.

I'm sure there was still some residual hostilities.

Persecution was still a threat. But the Philippians were the first to come out into the open. They drew a target on their backs. It was as if they were saying, "*Come and get us if you want, but we stand for Jesus.*"

It seems they'd read the words of Paul, and adopted his motto. For them **to live was Christ, to die gain.**

Paul understood that a person isn't ready to live until they're first ready to die... When an author writes a novel he knows in the beginning how he wants the book to end. It's impossible to develop the plot without knowing where you want the road to lead. Paul approached life this way. He settled the ending first.

Paul dealt with the final chapter from the outset - thus he was free to tackle the rest of His life head-on - always pressing forward, and never looking back.

If Paul lived... great... It was life with His Savior.

If he died... greater still... It was life with His Savior minus the rocks, and rods, and mobs, and persecution.

Here's verse 21 in another translation, "Living means opportunities for Christ, and dying - well, that's better yet!" To Paul, **Jesus was all that really mattered.**

Yes, Paul loved his family and friends and colleagues. Yes, he loved the churches he started. But outdistancing those concerns was His love for Jesus!

AW Tozer once wrote, "It's not that people don't want God, it's that people have things they want more than God! We are determined to have what we want most."

The question that we need to ask ourselves today is *what is it that we want most?*

To Paul, Jesus was not at the top of a long list of other priorities - He was *THE LIST*. Nor was He one slice of the pie of life. Jesus is *THE WHOLE PIE!*

Every other concern in his life was secondary to bringing glory to Jesus. Paul had eliminated all other rivals. There was no other attraction competing for his affections. His whole heart belonged to Jesus.

Yes, he had family, friends, church, and work - but everything else in Paul's life gained its significance as it

related to Jesus. Here's a Southern expression you'll understand. "Paul placed all his eggs in one basket."

Jesus is all that matters in the long run - and He's what makes everything else matter in the short run.

When our goal is to bring glory to ourselves, we become vulnerable to a whole host of problems...

It doesn't take much to upset our plans.

We end up trapped by worry and fear.

We're victimized by situations beyond our control.

But when I adopt Paul's philosophy - *to live is Christ, to die is gain* - I'm not worried about me - my image, or comfort, or convenience, or status, or success. No matter - as long as Christ is glorified, I win in the end.

If I live in a hut or a mansion... If I'm CEO or a grocery bagger... If my team wins by 5 touchdowns or loses by 5 touchdowns... If my life points people to Jesus I am the winner. It doesn't matter if anyone notices me - trust me, God in heaven will notice!

Paul was caught up in someone far greater than Himself. He would go anywhere - He would do anything - make any sacrifice needed to glorify Jesus.

Paul gave up his whole life for Jesus - but ironically, no one ever lived a fuller and richer life than Paul! As Jesus said (Matthew 10:39), "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

If your life is boring and dull - if it's lost its thrill, and adventure - if it's choked with worries, and fears that won't matter 100 years from now - its time to change...

Remember what I told you earlier, “It’s not that people don’t want God, it’s that people have other things they want more than God! We are determined to have what we want most.” Hey, *what is it that you want more than for Jesus to be glorified in your life?*

Jesus died for you. He loves you with a boundless love. He wants your life to count. He has a heaven-full of joy, and blessing, and excitement in store for you.

What better way to spend the one and only life you’ve been given than to live it for Jesus?

Let me ask you to fill in the blank, “**To live is _____.**” How would you answer? *Work - success - friends - kids - sports - sex - hobbies - popularity - security...*

Work that lacks fulfillment?

Success that’s temporary?

Friends that come and go?

Kids that’ll grow up and leave home?

Sports you can’t play forever?

Sex that leaves you empty and ashamed?

Hobbies that grow boring?

Popularity that’s fickle?

Security that’s an illusion?

Are these things really worth your one and only life?

Listen to Paul’s words here in Philippians 1, one more time - **to live is Christ, to die is gain!**

Make that your philosophy - *walk in his footsteps* - and like Paul, your life will be a grand adventure!