

## Finding God's Peace in Tumultuous Times: A Pandemic Devotional from the New Testament Book of Philippians

Devotional 3

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Just one thing. CoVid19 is all we see in the news. How many are infected? How many have died? Can our hospitals handle the coming wave of sick patients? It is often what we talk about. It impacts our thoughts each day of our lives. Should I risk going to the store? Should I go out at all? Should I wear a mask? Have I been exposed? How bad is it in my area? Do I know anyone with the disease? How is this impacting our economy? How is it impacting my personal finances? It can feel like life has become about just one thing in these unsettling times: CoVid19. It can be hard to find other things to talk about. Many of us are viewing life right now through the lens of CoVid19.

In our world we have become so accustomed to living our lives while having multiple ideas, perspectives and foci. We balance many things in busy lives. We have options, many options. We have had options not just should I go out, but where should I go out to eat? Or should I take in a movie, which movie? Or should I go to a performance, which kind: a play, a concert, a musical, a symphony or the opera? We are used to having options not just will they have toilet paper at the store, but which brand should I purchase? We live in what is called a "pluralistic" society. We have information about many ideas, concepts, worldviews, news reports and religions all available to us in the information age. We are accustomed to living in a world full of perspectives and choices and right now, many of our choices and options are being limited or taken away.



Just one thing. While dwelling on CoVid19 all day long is most certainly not a good thing for our emotional well-being and personal growth and development, as Christians we have been called all along to dwell upon just one thing: Christ. We do this by love. We are called to single-mindedly live out the two commands to love – Love the Lord our God with all of our heart, with all of our soul, with all of our mind, with all of our strength. And love our neighbors as ourselves. In doing both of these we immerse ourselves in the love of Christ, “We love because He first loved us.” (1 John 4:19) God loves us, not because we earned it or our worthy of it, but because He loves us just the way we are, warts, faults, imperfections, sins and all. God’s love comes to us freely – that is GRACE – God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense as we noted last week. Grace, Love, Christ – they are all bound up together in the just one thing that Christians are to focus upon.



This doesn't mean we ignore everything else. This doesn't mean we ignore the situation of people around us as we focus on Christ with our minds in the clouds. It means that we see the people around us through the lens of Christ, from the perspective of Christ, all for the glory of Christ. It means we evaluate our options with an eye to the question: “How will this glorify my Lord?” It means we choose to spend our time asking how to love God and our neighbor in the situation. It means we view ourselves as creatures created in the image of God, and despite our shortcomings, know that we are deeply, profoundly, cherished and loved by Him through whom all things were created, Christ Jesus!

For Christians, our just one thing is Jesus.

The work God has begun in us (Philippians 1:6), the upward call of God in Christ Jesus, the development of ourselves as persons becoming the persons God created us to be – this “spiritual” growth is a process of the work of the Holy Spirit within us. Through the working of the Holy Spirit we are enabled to become more and more like Christ who Himself was

single-mindedly focused on God and God's glory. But this is a process. It requires persistence on our part to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and to train our minds and hearts to seek God first above all else.

C.S. Lewis wrote about taking up the perspective of Christ each day in a profoundly insightful way in his book, *Mere Christianity*:

"The real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.

"We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system: because now we are letting Him work at the right part of us. It is the difference between paint, which is merely laid on the surface, and a dye or stain which soaks right through."

What are the CoVid19 wild animals in your brain clamoring for your attention these days? Can you push them back and seek to listen for that other Voice, the Voice of the Spirit of Christ speaking words of love, grace, peace and reassurance to your heart? Will you seek to live a life of love? Will you seek to live for just one thing – Jesus Christ and Him crucified?

Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

The Apostle Paul shares about this from his own personal experience and life in our reading from Philippians today. Paul makes the extraordinary statement in Philippians 1:21:

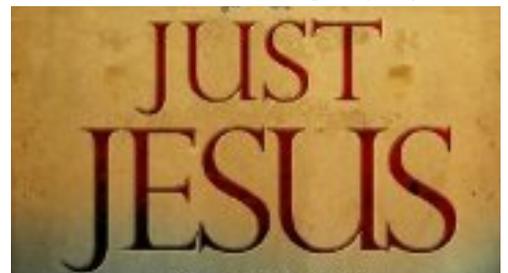
"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

For Paul life was about just one thing: Christ. And to die was gain because then the Lord he served by faith in this life, he then would see face to face. This is not easy.

Writing in *The IVP New Testament Commentary on Philippians*, Gordon Fee says:

"We should note, finally, that even though this larger section (vv. 18-26) begins and ends on the note of joy and of Christ's being glorified, verses 21-23 hold the key to everything, both to this letter and to Paul's life as a whole. Paul's saying, 'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain' puts everything into focus for us, as far as our understanding the apostle is concerned. It seems clear that this is what he also desires for the Philippians—and for us as well. Both our progress and that of the gospel depends on whether such a maxim characterizes our individual and corporate lives.

The Philippians' problem—and ours—is the strong tendency to speak thus but in effect to live otherwise. One wonders what the people of God might truly be like in our postmodern world if we were once again people of this singular passion. Too often for us it is 'For me to live is Christ, plus other pursuits' (work, leisure, accumulating wealth, relationships, etc.). And if the truth were known, all too often the 'plus factor' has become our primary passion: 'For me to live is my work.' Both our progress and our joy regarding the gospel are altogether contingent on whether Christ is our primary, singular passion. This is surely an infinitely greater option than the self-gratification that dominates the culture within which this commentary has been written."



By means of a virus, you have been reminded lately of focusing on just one thing, but can you hear the call of Christ within you to make Him more and more the focus of your life? As you work through this Scripture, as you pray and reflect, can you seek to follow the example of Paul and make it so in your life? Make your just one thing be Jesus.

**Read, Reflect and Apply\*\*** – Ask God to speak to you and listen!

\*\*Questions preceded by two asterisks indicate application relevant to your life.

Read Philippians 1:12-30 and then consider these questions.

### **Verses 12-18**

#### **Paul in Prison**

\*The Apostle Paul is in prison again! He keeps getting thrown into prison, just as he was when he first visited Philippi. This imprisonment seems to have been in Rome, probably around 62AD. And what is his attitude about this? Frustration? Annoyance? Doubting? What does he say?

\*How can Paul have this attitude with such troubling life circumstances? Is he simply making lemonade out of the lemons of life is there more to it?

\*What is his primary concern?

From Gordon Fee in the IVP New Testament Commentary:

Paul's reflection on this matter is remarkable indeed. Though he would surely prefer freedom so that he himself might evangelize, he recognizes that God has used his curtailment to prod others. The rejoicing that ensues (v. 18) must be taken seriously. Here is one for whom the gospel is bigger than his personal role in making it known.

\*\*How much is Paul's concern a primary concern for us? How much should it be?

### **Verses 12-18 and 19-26**

\*Paul is writing in the common style of a family letter in the Greco-Roman world of his time. How does he communicate the news about his situation? What are the relationships in his life that he connects to his own present circumstance?

\*Paul has found joy despite the difficulties in his life. What reasons does he give for having such joy?

\*In addition to these what gives Paul "courage" and confident hope in his circumstances?

\*\*How might we follow Paul's example and develop such courage and joy whenever we face difficult circumstances of our own in life?

\*What do you think is the "deliverance" Paul is confident of in the Spirit and because the Philippians are praying for him?

\*What does Paul mean to live is Christ and to die is gain?

How can he possibly feel this way?

\*\*What would it look like for you to feel this way? Do you?

### **Verse 27-30**

In verse 27 Paul talks about "living in a manner worthy of the gospel". The word for living there actually comes from the same root word as "citizen". Paul keeps in mind the culture in Philippi which took such pride in being a Roman colony with many citizens, and he reminds the Philippians to live as citizens of another place – citizens living lives worthy of or consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

\*What do you think that looks like?

\*\*What would it look like in our lives today? How can we live as people with a dual citizenship – citizens of this country but also citizens of heaven?

\*What other instructions does Paul give to the Philippians as they are beginning to experience difficulties similar to what Paul experienced when he first came to them?

\*\*Which of these speak to you in your present circumstance? How can you grow in them? How can they help you be more firmly connected as a citizen of heaven?

### **Closing Application and Prayer**

\*\*What has God impressed upon your heart as you look back over this study? Close in prayer talking to Him about the implications for your life. What do you want to say to Him? Is there anything you want to ask Him about this?

