

LAUGH AGAIN: Experience Outrageous Joy

STUDY FOUR

Laughing through Life's Dilemmas

Philippians 1:21–30

Paul's credo could be paraphrased, "My earnest expectation, my bold hope is that Christ be exalted."

—Charles R. Swindoll

LIFE is full of painful dilemmas! *Volitional* dilemmas have to do with making a hard choice between two equally appealing situations, such as what college to attend or what career path to take. *Emotional* dilemmas press us to decide between our head—what makes sense—and our heart—what feels right. *Geographical* dilemmas arise when we are faced with choosing one of two different places, such as whether to accept a new job that requires moving away from all that is familiar.

We join Chuck Swindoll in this *Searching the Scriptures* study on Philippians 1:21–30 to learn how Paul responded to his painful dilemma that we might face ours with the same Spirit-empowered joy as he did.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Describe an example of a dilemma you have faced and how you found direction.

Thankfully, the Lord faithfully leads us through His Word if we turn to Him with our dilemmas. Ask the Lord for wisdom today for your situation. Invite the Holy Spirit alongside you and ask Him to guide you down the right path as you search the Scriptures today.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Laughing through Life's Dilemmas

Philippians 1:21–30



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

The apostle Paul stated his life credo beautifully in Philippians 1:20–21:

According to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (NASB)

Paul desired to be with the Lord, but he also wanted to be with the Philippians to help them grow in their faith and as a church. That was *his* dilemma. Perhaps with a sigh he exclaimed, “I do not know which to choose.” What could he do? What should he do? His irresolution and indecision left him challenged.

In his message, Chuck listed some pros and cons of being with the Lord and staying with the Philippians.

Pros of Being with the Lord

- Being immediately in the presence of Christ (Philippians 1:23)
- Safety from stonings, beatings, imprisonments, threats, and sleepless nights (2 Corinthians 11:23–27)
- Instant relief from his “thorn in the flesh” (12:7 NASB)
- The fullness of joy and the eternal pleasure from the presence of God (Psalm 16:11)

Cons of Being with the Lord

- Being absent from the Philippian believers
- Inability to provide an earthly witness to Christ
- A gap left among the apostles



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Pros of Remaining with the Philippians

- Continuation of a fruitful ministry among believers
- Ability to provide security and hope to persecuted believers
- Ability to provide training for the next generation of servant-leaders

Cons of Remaining with the Philippians

- Absence from the physical presence of Christ
- Absence from heavenly glory
- Continued suffering in the world



Observation: Paul's Personal Dilemma—Philippians 1:21–26

Observation, the process of looking closely at the details of a passage of Scripture, helps you capture the setting and key ideas, which become important building blocks for interpretation. Paul's personal dilemma gave expression to some of the most powerful theological reflections in Scripture.

Read again Philippians 1:20–30. How many times did Paul refer to Christ in these few verses?

What other words did Paul repeat through this section? List them below.



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Based on reading these verses, how would you state in your own words Paul's dilemma? What words in the passage help you come to your conclusion?

We wouldn't say that Paul had a death wish, but he was torn between longing to be with Christ (which required Paul's death!) and remaining alive to encourage his beloved Philippians. As he built a case for staying alive, he challenged the Philippian believers to join him in the struggle to proclaim the gospel.



Interpretation: A Spiritual Challenge to the Church—Philippians 1:27–30

Based on Paul's deep affection for the church at Philippi, he desired that all believers experience both a sense of partnership in the gospel and a deepening of their experience with Christ. Studying key words in the passage can unlock the meaning of Paul's opening message to these beloved followers of Christ.

Paul issued a multilevel spiritual challenge to the Philippian Christians. First, he urged the Philippians to conduct themselves "in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ" (Philippians 1:27). Paul used the Greek word *politeuomai*, which means to "to live one's life" according to one's place of citizenship. Why would Paul be concerned about the "conduct" of the Philippian believers?

He also urged the Philippians to strive "together for the faith of the gospel" (1:27 NASB). Paul used the Greek word *sunathleō*, which carries the idea of athletes struggling as a team to defeat their opponents. Why would this be an important aspect of Paul's exhortation to the Philippians?



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Furthermore, Paul urged the Philippians to stand together in the face of intimidation from the enemies of the gospel. How does standing together as Christians in the face of opposition relate to striving together for the cause of Christ?

By being transparent about his own dilemma—choosing between going to be with Christ and remaining to serve the Philippian Christians—Paul emphasized the joy of joining together in both striving for the gospel and suffering for it *together!*

HINT: See page 31 of Chuck's [commentary](#) on this section of Philippians in *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*.



Correlation: Bearing the Struggle Together in Christ

Correlation is the step in the *Searching the Scriptures* process that uses related passages of Scripture to support interpretation. Paul's clarion motif of banding together in the face of spiritual opposition reprises in another New Testament epistle written to believers facing a similar dilemma of persecution:

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:23–25)

In what ways do these words relate directly to Paul's letter to the Philippian believers?



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What specific actions are we to take as a family of believers when faced with the dilemma of persecution?



Application: The Privilege of Trusting in Christ

Ultimately, once we go to be with Jesus in heaven, we will be delivered from all the challenges and heartaches, dangers and terrors associated with our being persecuted because of our faith in Him. Until that time, we are left to face these dilemmas with faith and hope. Chuck reminds us, however:

- We are not alone (Philippians 1:27).
- We are promised the victory (1:28).
- We are called to suffer (1:29).
- We are in good company (1:30).

How does knowing that we are not alone strengthen our faith and give us hope?

How does accepting Christ's victory at the cross give us courage to keep the faith in the face of mounting opposition to the gospel?



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How does joining in the suffering for the gospel shine the light of Christ's hope to a watching world?

How can believers encourage each other in the face of spiritual opposition?



A FINAL PRAYER

*Thank You, Father, for reminding me that there is much joy in sharing in the sufferings of Christ. And thank You for my **brothers and sisters in Christ around the world** struggling together for His name. Grant them Your personal and powerful protection and hope today. Cause them to stand firm in their faith until the day they stand before You and receive their ultimate reward. In the powerful name of Jesus, I pray, amen.*



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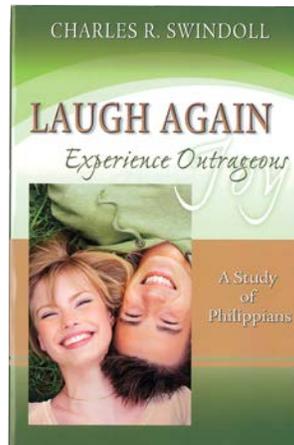
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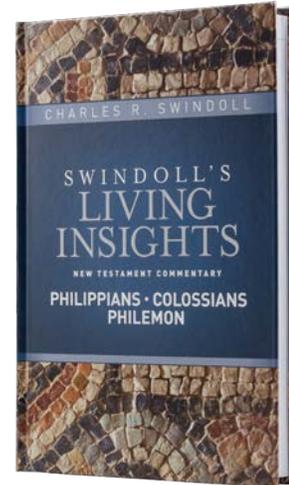
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

