

Conversation Starters

- How has your perspective of the world changed (if any) during the pandemic?
- How have you been holding up during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Discuss

The apostle Paul was a pillar for the Christian faith and often called the greatest missionary who ever lived, yet he suffered a lot for his faith. Here is how he once described his life:

“I have... been in prison... been flogged... been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received... the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen... in danger in the country, in danger at sea... I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.” ([2 Cor. 11:23-27, NIV](#))

- If you were a pillar in the early church, what would you expect life to be like?

Despite the challenging life that Paul lived, his attitude toward his circumstances was surprisingly positive. The pandemic has added some challenges to our daily lives. While the default for us may be to turn inward and focus on our challenges and what it’s doing to us, we can change our focus and choose to turn outward to ask ourselves what God wants to do through us right now.

“And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God’s message without fear.” ([Philippians 1:12-14, NLT](#))

- If someone was reading your social media, would they find an inward or outward focus?
- Is your life encouraging and reflecting Christ in new and fresh ways to others right now?
- Are you bringing joy to others now, or enabling others to complain and criticize?

Paul goes on to share that his attitude toward life was all focused on Christ: “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.” It’s so easy for us to live for ourselves, to be consumed with what we want or need. We can even be this way spiritually - a spiritual narcissism. But as Christ followers, the call is to fully engage the worship of God and service of God no matter what the circumstance.

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.” ([Philippians 1:21-26, NIV](#))

- Have you considered what new opportunities may be present in your life now?
- How can God use you right now to serve others?
- How can Paul’s attitude and perspective encourage you right now?

Next Steps

Take a look at your social media feeds, or take time to reflect on how you’ve been communicating with others recently. What does your attitude look like and life reflect? Let Paul’s life encourage you to help your life focus more on Christ and reflecting Him.

Sept 21: [The Meck Institute: The Practice and Purpose of Prayer](#)

Sept 28/30: [TeamLifeOnline](#)

Further Reflection

Read [2 Corinthians 11:23-27](#); [Philippians 1:12-14, 21-26](#).

Pray

God, when circumstances are good and when they are challenging, you always care and your presence is constant. When circumstances are hard our default tendency is to be preoccupied with ourselves. Thank you for meeting us with grace when we need it. Help us to live a life that is turned outward and focused on our relationship with you, especially during this time when it’s so easy to turn inward.