

What Is Your Life's Motto?

We are all familiar with some famous business slogans:

- “Just do it.” (Nike)
- “Think different.” (Apple)
- “I’m lovin’ it.” (McDonald’s)
- “Ideas for life.” (Panasonic)
- “Melts in your mouth, not in your hands.” (M&Ms)
- “There are some things money can’t buy. For everything else, there’s _____.”

There is a difference between a motto and a slogan. A slogan is defined as a phrase that is easy to remember and used by a business to attract attention. A motto is a short sentence or phrase chosen as encapsulating the beliefs or ideals guiding an individual or institution (church).

Mottos:

- “Semper fi.” (Marines)
- “In God we trust” (adopted 1956)
- Engineer’s motto: *If it isn’t broken, take it apart and fix it.*
- Baptist Health Care motto: *Helping people throughout life’s journey.*

I’m thinking about a personal motto for 2019 – a motto that defines my purpose in life. What’s a meaningful biblical motto for a Christian?

- Ecclesiastes is “Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” It’s biblical, but not really a meaningful motto for a Christian. The Bible gives us some much better choices for your life’s motto.
- Philippians 4:13: *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*
- 2 Corinthians 5:7: *We walk by faith and not by sight.*
- Galatians 2:20: *I have been crucified with Christ.*

I want to tell a story first. God works in mysterious ways. I picked up a free book at NOBTS about Christianity in China after the Cultural Revolution titled *The Dragon and the Lamb*. It briefly told the story of Dr. Bill Wallace. Then I bought the rare reprinted book *Bill Wallace of China*. It was 1925. Bill Wallace the seventeen-year-old had mechanical skill. One day while fixing his car he knew God was calling him to be a medical missionary to Africa. Bill did his premedical work at University of Tennessee, received his M.D. from University Medical School in Memphis, and became a resident surgeon at Knoxville General Hospital. He wrote a letter to the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board volunteering to serve as a medical missionary. At the same time the director of the SBF

Mission Board received Dr. Wallace's letter, he also received a letter from Stout Memorial Hospital in Wuchow, China. Stout Memorial Hospital desperately needed a surgeon. As Dr. Wallace was interviewing with the SBF Mission Board to go to China, he was offered a job as a surgeon in a friend's private practice. He rejected the money and the fame to follow God's call to China. He spent a year in Hong Kong learning Cantonese.

Dr. Wallace served at Stout Memorial Hospital in China during the Japanese invasion 1930s-40s and then the Communist Red invasion late 1940s-50s. During the Japanese invasion of China the hospital was bombed and Dr. Wallace and his staff fled and opened a clinic in a small village. When the war was over they returned to Wuchow. There was a brief period of peace, but the war between the Red Communists and Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists was moving south toward Wuchow.

The SBF Mission Board allowed the missionaries to stay or leave for Hong Kong. Dr. Wallace prayed and decided to stay behind the red "Bamboo Curtain" and supervise the mission hospital. The Communists tolerated the presence of foreigners in Wuchow until the start of the Korean War 1950. Because the Communists were now fighting America and the United Nations they fomented hatred of America. In 1951, Dr. Wallace was accused of being an American spy. He was charged with fake crimes. He was paraded through the streets of Wuchow with a placard containing false accusations. He was beaten to death with bamboo poles in a prison cell. The lying Communists said he committed suicide. Chinese Christians buried Dr. Wallace in Wuchow. They erected a pillar on his grave with the inscription "For to me to live is Christ."

Dr. Wallace's bones were reburied 1985 in Greenwood Cemetery, Knoxville, Tennessee. A replica of the pillar made by Chinese Christians in 1951 was placed over Dr. Wallace's grave with the same inscription, "For to me to live is Christ." I want to visit his grave some day.

Philippians 1:21 is an excellent motto: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* This is the motto I want to define my life in 2019 (and beyond).

When Paul wrote Philippians, he was not in the infamous Mamertine Prison as he was when he wrote 2 Timothy. He was in his own rented house, where for two years he was free to impart the gospel to all who came to him (Acts 28:14-31). Paul wrote the letter after facing death in Jerusalem and waiting for his trial in Rome.

Paul faced two alternatives and it was a tough choice. But which alternative would become reality wasn't really his choice. The Philippian believers prayed for Paul to live, and Paul seemed confident that he would be delivered from prison and have more years of fruitful labor. Paul was waiting to know whether it would be life or death. He felt the anxiety of waiting. Waiting is the hard part!

What is the significance of *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain?*

To LIVE is Christ.

What does it mean to LIVE? Biological existence isn't enough for people. Animals only need biological existence (the exception is dogs who need friendship with people!) What does *living* mean for you? People need meaning and purpose. **In chaplaincy at Baptist Hospital Pensacola, I learned to assess patients for four things: holy, hope, meaning, and support.** What gives a person's life hope and meaning? Meaning and purpose is found in relationships and accomplishments (the people we know and the work we do). While serving as a chaplain I was paged to the Emergency Department to visit a young man who attempted suicide. (He tried to shoot himself and the bullet grazed the back of his head.) I met with him several times while he recovered in the mental health unit. He told me that he was grateful to be alive. He gained hope and meaning from the love of his wife and son. He prayed to believe in Christ. I met with an older cardiac patient (He had the stapled scar down the center of his chest.) He used a table jigsaw to create wooden toys and puzzles for his grandchildren. That gave him meaning and purpose. I met a woman with malignant brain cancer. She lost her hair. She lost her ability to drive her Camaro and one of her relationships was painful. She cried as she talked about her estranged daughter. That was a hard loss of meaning and purpose for her, but she still had the holy – her relationship with God. Mere biological existence is not enough for people. People need hope, meaning, support, and most of all, connection with the holy – God.

What did Paul mean "to LIVE is Christ?" Paul was referring to life in this world and maybe also eternal life with Christ. He gave three reasons for his hope to stay alive.

1) **Paul was living to share the gospel with the Gentiles.** 1:12-13: *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.* The imperial guard included several hundred soldiers. The Roman soldiers talked about Paul's gospel in the barracks and around the fire pit at night.

I hear them talking in the barracks at night:

S1: "Why are we guarding this Jew, Paul? What did he do?"

S2: "Nothing. Paul tells a story of another Jew who was crucified by a Roman governor in Judea a few years ago. He says this Jew was the son of god who came back to life."

S1: "Came back to life? You believe it?"

S2: "I don't know. Paul believes it. He lives for it. He's willing to die for it. There are other people in Rome who believe it. They're called Christians."

2) **Paul was living for the "defense" of the gospel.** 1:7: *It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the **defense** and confirmation of the gospel.* 1:15-16: *Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter*

*do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the **defense** of the gospel.* I live for the defense of the gospel. (My Doctor of Ministry has an apologetics specialization. If you would like to have me return and speak on apologetics, then let me know. We could make it an evangelistic meeting to invite friends.)

3) **Paul was living to encourage other believers.** 1:22-26: *If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me (me serving you). Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.*

“To live is Christ” means our ultimate meaning and purpose are found in Christ. Our most important relationship is with Christ and our most important accomplishment is whatever we do to obey His commands – love one another and go and make disciples of all nations.

To DIE is gain.

The Greek word ‘gain’ means to gain an advantage, to profit, and win.

When Paul wrote “To die is gain,” he meant two realities: “If I die, then I win!” and “If I die, then Christ is glorified!” Paul oscillated back and forth between life and death. It’s a tough choice!

- Paul preferred death over life, 1:21: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*
- But then after noting that continuing to live will imply fruitful labor he expressed his inability to choose, 1:22: *If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two.*
- In the next verse he again made his preference very clear, 1:23: *My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.* Death for Paul was positive as a means to an end, “to be with Christ and to glorify Christ.”
- But in 1:24 practical necessity won the day: it is “more necessary” to “remain in the flesh” for the encouragement of the Philippian believers.

I have felt this tension at times. It’s a tough choice! I would like to die and be with Christ, but Christ is in control of my life and I leave the choice to him. If Christ has a plan for me to stay in this world to defend the gospel and encourage other believers, then he will protect and provide.

When Paul wrote “to die is gain,” he meant his martyrdom would be a powerful witness and gain glory for Christ. Paul knew his death would be a “gain” because it would make other Christians bold to share the gospel and it would lead unbelievers to salvation. Paul would be the talk of Rome. Every news report and social media would tell his story and spread the gospel for the glory of Christ. Some would say Paul was foolish. Others would investigate his belief and become Christians.

Optional (may not use): A contemporary example of this may be Jonathan Chau. When Jonathan Chau was martyred on a remote island trying to share the gospel with a hostile tribe, he knew he would die. "You guys might think I'm crazy in all this but I think it's worthwhile to declare Jesus to these people," Chau wrote in his last note to his family. He had a desire to share the gospel with an unreached tribe. He chose martyrdom. Was it Christ's will? Only Christ knows the answer. "To live is Christ, and to die is gain."

To die is gain describes the death of Bill Wallace of China. After Bill Wallace was murdered by the Communists the nurse he served with at the mission hospital was held captive for six months. She was released and returned to America. She said, "I believe that somehow God used Bill's death for His glory even as He used his life. I've heard from so many who have been inspired and encouraged by Bill's dedication that I have come to believe it was a part of God's plan for his life." Bill Wallace's martyrdom continues to gain glory for Christ. The book *Bill Wallace of China* is proof. I read it 67 years later. His grave in Tennessee is an obelisk, like the one made in China in 1951, with the inscription "To live is Christ, to die is gain." His life and death continue to glorify Christ and inspire other believers.

If I live, then I glorify Christ. If I die, then I glorify Christ. It's a win-win!

So let's say you make your life motto "To live is Christ, to die is gain." Does that mean you must become a missionary and sacrifice your life like Paul, Dr. Bill Wallace or Jonathan Chau? No, only if Jesus calls you to do it. It means live for Christ whatever you do. It means your work place or career is your Jerusalem mission field. It means you must also look for and serve in your Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth mission fields.

To live is CHRIST, to die is GAIN. We only gain with Christ! We gain redemption and eternal life. I pray this motto in the morning, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Lord Jesus, I live for you today. I live to know you. I live to do your will. I die to my selfish desires, ambitions, expectations, and I live for your glory today." Yes, the context is physical death, but it is a spiritual death for those of us who are not being persecuted.

This song by Sidewalk Prophets says what I want to say:

"To Live Is Christ"

If I rise, let me rise on you
 Not on all of my successes, my esteem or my pursuits
 If I lose, let me lose my life
 Cause if I belong to Jesus, the flesh is crucified

For me to live is Christ
 For me to live is Christ

For me to live is Christ, to die is gain

If I grow, let me grow in You
Wilt the seeds of wanting more
Ripping pride out by the roots
And if I'm still, let me hear You speak
Not the tone of my transgressions,
But the song of the Redeemed

For me to live is Christ
For me to live is Christ
For me to live is Christ, to die is gain

For me to live is Christ
For me to live is Christ
For me to live is Christ, to die is gain

My great desire is to be with You
But this is the place you chose for me
This is the place you chose for me
To lift my cross and give everything
This is the time you gave to me
This is the time you gave to me

For me to live is Christ, For me to live is Christ
For me to live is Christ, to die is gain
I'll never be the same, I'll never be the same
For me to live is Christ, to die is gain

If you were to create a motto for this church then what would it be?

I would like to suggest **“One family in Christ, three languages.”**