

Living
for **GOD**

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LIVING FOR GOD

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Preface

Because life is precious, we try to squeeze all we can out of it and put all we can into it. We exercise, eat sensibly (with the exception of overeating at church potlucks), try to sleep eight hours nightly, and schedule regular medical checkups. Some of us plan for retirement, hoping to live comfortably in our senior years. But the best life isn't simply one of good health, financial security, and comfort. The best life builds on the foundation of faith in Christ, honors God, and receives His approval. This kind of life makes every day enjoyable and significant.

The apostle Paul understood what the best life is all about. He declared, "For to me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21) and testified, "Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

These lessons are dedicated to helping you live for God, grow in your relationship with Him, and experience victory over sin. This is the life God wants you to lead. You don't have to settle for less!



LESSON 1

Living for God Starts with a Choice

“Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

Joshua, Israel’s leader at the time of the conquest of Canaan, had turned 110. Knowing he did not have much longer to live, he offered his beloved nation Israel a final challenge to live for the Lord. He gathered Israel’s tribes together at Shechem, rehearsed Israel’s history, and commanded them to make a clear choice.

1. Read Joshua 24:1–13. Why couldn’t Israel take credit for the nation’s existence and survival?

2. Thinking back over your personal history, what has the Lord done for you that

you could not have accomplished on your own?

ISRAEL'S CHOICE

The Lord had been good to Israel, and such kindness deserved an appropriate response. Joshua urged the Israelites to make a clear, firm choice between serving the false gods of the Canaanites and serving the Lord God of Israel (vv. 14, 15).

3. Read verse 24. What choice did the Israelites make?

CHOOSE TO FOLLOW CHRIST

When Jesus ministered on earth, He challenged people from many walks of life to follow Him. Each person had a choice: to pursue his own course or devote his life to Jesus. Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, and John made the all-important decision to follow Jesus after discovering firsthand that Jesus could do what seemed impossible.

The four men had fished all night, but not one fish had swum into their nets. They were washing the nets on the shore that memorable

morning when Jesus entered one of their boats and taught the people who lined the shore.

After “class,” Jesus commanded Simon to “launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught” (Luke 5:4). Would Simon choose to obey Jesus?

4. Read Luke 5:5–7.

(a) What objection did Simon raise?

b) What choice did he make?

(c) What did making this choice lead to?

Jesus offered Simon and the other fishermen another choice: to leave their fishing business and follow Him as fishers of men (v. 10). Would they walk away from the greatest catch of fish they had ever realized, knowing that the teeming nets represented abundant income? Would they follow Jesus?

5. Read Luke 5:11. What choice did the four men make?

Jesus doesn’t call everyone to leave his or her occupation, but He does call every believer

To follow Jesus means to walk the same path He walked. His path is straight and narrow (Matthew 7:14), but it leads to joy, peace, significance, and eternal reward.

LIVING FOR GOD

to follow Him. You may work as a plumber or a printer or a professor, but your primary calling is to follow Jesus as a godly believer. It is a choice you must make. Jesus said, “If any man serve me, let him follow me” (John 12:26).

CHOOSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE CHRIST AS LORD

Saul of Tarsus never expected to make a U-turn on the road to Damascus. He planned to go straight from Jerusalem to Damascus, arrest followers of Christ, chain them, and deliver them to Jerusalem for punishment. But something dramatic happened along the way. It turned his life around forever.

6. Read Acts 9:1–6.

- (a) Who appeared to Saul on the Damascus Road?

- (b) In your opinion, why was Saul “trembling and astonished”?

- (c) How did Saul show that he acknowledged Jesus as Lord?

Saul intended to arrest Jesus’ followers in Damascus, but the risen Lord arrested him before he reached his destination. The Lord,

in Whom Saul placed his faith, appointed him an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Galatians 1:1; 1 Timothy 2:7). He became known as the apostle Paul, and he devoted the rest of his life to proclaiming the gospel on three continents.

7. How determined are you to follow the risen Son of God as your Lord?

8. What specific thing do you believe the Lord wants you to do for Him this week?

Paul learned quickly that living for God isn't easy. He encountered hostility similar to what he had hurled at believers before he trusted in Christ. Many Jews hated him and even tried to kill him. Sometimes Gentiles rioted against him when he preached in their cities. He narrowly escaped with his life when hateful Jews closed in on him at Damascus. Believers saved him by lowering him in a basket over the city's wall by night (Acts 9:23–25). At Lystra, Paul's Jewish persecutors persuaded residents to kill him. An angry mob stoned him, dragged him out of their city, and left him there, thinking he was dead (Acts 14:19). At Philippi, he and his coworker Silas were beaten and thrown into a jail's innermost cell, where stocks secured their feet. However, neither the beatings nor the confinement suppressed their joy. They filled the jail's dank

midnight air with songs of praise to the Lord (Acts 16:24, 25).

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul listed the trials he had endured for the sake of the gospel. They included exhausting work, frequent incarceration, death-threatening episodes, lashings, beatings, stoning, shipwreck, the threat of drowning, constant dangerous travel in cities and open country, treacherous sea crossings, betrayals, weariness, pain, hunger, thirst, sleepless nights, food deprivation, exposure to cold, lack of sufficient clothing, and deep concern for the churches he had established (2 Corinthians 11:23–28).

But Paul had chosen to live for God, so he kept preaching the gospel. He committed himself to the task the Lord had given him, and nothing would prevent him from completing it.

TESTIMONY BEFORE A KING

You might think that arraignment before a powerful ruler would dissuade Paul from his appointed task. But it didn't. The risen Lord had predicted Paul would bear His name before kings (Acts 9:15), and sure enough Paul did so.

Acts 26 explains that Paul, a prisoner of the Roman Empire, stood before King Agrippa and recounted how the Lord had saved him and commissioned him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He testified, "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision. . . . Having therefore obtained

Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa, who had beheaded the apostle James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:1–3). He was also the great-grandson

help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great” (vv. 19, 22).

9. Which of Paul’s trials do you think were the most severe?

10. What opposition and/or hardship might you have to endure as a consequence of living for God?

11. What motivates you to endure trials as a follower of Christ?

ULTIMATE JOY AND SERVICE

Later, when Paul was under a sentence of house arrest in Rome, he addressed a letter to the church at Philippi. Many Christians call Philippians the “Joy Epistle” because it contains so many references to joy and rejoicing. Even house arrest and the possibility of execution could not erase Paul’s joy.

Years earlier Paul had chosen to live for God, a choice that gave him deep and permanent joy. His choice on the Damascus Road remained strong years later in Rome. He told the Philippians, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” He was determined to

of Herod the Great, who had ordered the slaughter of all the male infants upon learning that Jesus had been born (Matthew 2:1, 16). He ruled territories northeast of Palestine on behalf of the Romans.

honor the Lord for the duration of his life. If an executioner's sword ended his life, he would die with an unwavering testimony.

While under house arrest, Paul seized every opportunity to live for God. He wrote the inspired New Testament letters of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. He also shared the gospel with the elite Roman soldiers who guarded him. As a result of his sterling life and witness, some of the guards trusted in Christ.

12. Read Philippians 1:13 and 4:22. How far did Paul's testimony for Christ reach?

FINISHING WELL

After his release from house arrest, Paul did not stop living for God. He continued to travel and preach the gospel until he was rearrested. This time he probably remained in a Roman prison until the authorities executed him.

Second Timothy, addressed to a young pastor, was Paul's last New Testament letter. Having lived for God throughout his Christian life, he offered wise counsel to Timothy. He urged him to flee "youthful lusts" and to follow "righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). He also emphasized the role of God's inspired Word in guiding the believer to spiritual maturity (3:16, 17).

As Paul neared the end of his life, he reflected on the life he had lived for God. In 2 Timothy 4:6 and 7 he wrote, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” Living for God had not been easy, as the word “fight” suggests. The path of following the Lord had been long and arduous, not a sprint but a marathon. Nevertheless, every bout and every step had been worthwhile. Paul had lived for God’s glory. He had led many people to Christ. Now he was about to meet the Lord and receive a victor’s crown.

Paul penned these words in verse 8: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.” The Lord’s approval would erase all the trials he had endured and lift all the burdens he had carried.

Choosing to live for God is always the right choice!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

1. The apostle James described human life as “a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). However, life extends beyond death; and the Christian who chooses to live for God and does so realizes eternal significance. The apostle John wrote, “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:17).

The word Paul used for “crown” is stephanos. The stephanos was a laurel wreath awarded to victors at Greece’s athletic games.

How does knowing life on earth is brief motivate you to live for God?

2. All who live for God influence their friends, family members, and fellow employees. Matthew 5:16 indicates that the goal of doing good works is to persuade others to glorify our Heavenly Father. If you live for God, what response do you expect to receive from your friends, family members, and fellow employees?

3. What do you think a believer loses if he chooses not to live for God? What does he gain if he chooses to live for God?