

Christ Our Life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 October 2013

Preacher: Eric Scott

[0 : 00] You know, one of the privileges about being a pastor is just meeting people and seeing God change their lives.

And it's amazing the power of the gospel and what it does in our lives. And so as I thought about the journey God has a watermark on and the people that he's allowed the church to continue to touch with the message of the gospel, there's so many stories here.

And I know that Joey here is just one snapshot of so many amazing stories of God changing people. And so I've asked just Joey to come up. And she said she just started to get a little nervous, but I think you're great.

And I wanted just to ask you, so Joey and her husband come here. You saw that they had their baby was dedicated. Last time we did a baby dedication. He's a really small guy.

I'm joking. He's a kickboxer, international kickboxer. And I just asked Joey to come up in as I think about people God has changed and in families that God is changing.

[1 : 05] I just, it's amazing. So would you share a little bit about yourself and your family? Well, I'm from South Africa and my husband's from Cameroon and we met here in Hong Kong.

And, you know, it's a joke in our family that we both left Africa and met each other overseas in Asia. And we have a lot of children. You must have seen them. Three. Joshua, Noah, and Alina.

And we also joke we call them the African village. So we left Africa to make our own village here in Hong Kong. And I actually work for West Island School. This is the school where I'm actually working.

We're at my office. Welcome. And Alina is a personal trainer and he does, he competes in kickboxing competitions as well. I went on just, my kids go, you got to go on YouTube.

And I watched one of his matches there. I think it lasted like 31 seconds or something like that. Yes, it's not very long. He bowed most of the time. Yeah, yeah. So as you guys think about your family and your coming here to Watermark, what are some things God has been doing in you lately or in your family?

[2 : 10] Do you want to share some of that? Well, a really big thing that happened this year for our family as such was in April this year, my husband was saved. In April this year, my husband accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior.

And this was so amazing. That's okay. I never cry up here. I know. I've noticed. Why? You should cry sometime.

I prayed for him for years and I was actually saved when I was a teenager. And, you know, I just forgot about God and went on with my life. And I found him here when Alina and I were sort of struggling in our marriage.

And God showed me that I was making him and everything else the most important thing in my life when I should actually make God the most important person in my life. And he made it so that he brought me literally down to my knees where I really had to come back to church and just spend my focus on him.

And during this time, I was baptized and I was just trying to be an example to my husband. And, you know, he wasn't interested in going to church or meeting any friends from church.

[3 : 22] I mean, even if we had some kind of gathering and I invited him, he was totally against it. He was like, oh, church people, they are such hypocrites. And I just continued to pray and pray.

And there were times where I really felt that I couldn't anymore. I really couldn't anymore. I felt lonely at the end of myself. And I just wondered when God was going to save him because I couldn't carry our family anymore.

I felt like I was carrying our family solely with my prayers. And I thought I was alone. But in fact, I wasn't. He really was. Because our father was really carrying me.

And I didn't know that he was. Now when I'm sitting here on the stool, I can't believe I sat here for last year's second anniversary back there. I was pregnant. I had my other baby.

And I thought, what am I doing here? I'm so tired. And my husband isn't here. He should be here with me, helping me with my children and being in church together. We should be serving the Lord together.

[4 : 21] And that was that major thing that happened to our family. It changed everything when he became saved. It was so wonderful. That's amazing. Yeah. I remember just praying with you after church and just sharing your story and just saying, God, if God is here, then he's in control and he will work, right?

Yes. I see that now. It's amazing. Yeah. So if you think about this journey, even this last year, what would you say some of the things God's been teaching you about himself or about you?

Myself, I had to definitely change a lot. I mean, I always thought, yeah, he needs to be saved. He needs to know the Lord. But I had to do some major changes as a wife.

And this is hard because, as you can see, I have a very strong personality, a big voice, and a very opinionated. So I was always, you know, wanting to lead my husband when, in fact, even though he wasn't a Christian who saved, he's still the man of the house.

And my grandfather used to say, there can be only one captain. And I never understood what he said that when I was a child growing up. But then I realized afterwards, being a Christian wife or a Christian woman, this is, you know, you need to submit to your husband.

[5 : 30] This is a word, a big word that I wasn't able to accept. But I realized that the Bible teaches you that in your actions, you don't have to speak.

You just, by your actions, your wife can win over your husband. And somehow, I don't know, maybe that's what happened. I don't know. A big thing in this year, also, I've noticed this big change where we pray together at night with our children.

We're reading the children's Bible together with Joshua. Alina is making Joshua read the Bible, the section of Joshua. And I was trying to read with Noah, who's two, and he doesn't speak.

So he was pointing and making all kinds of suggestions in his baby language. But it was just wonderful. Just that I'm sitting together with my family, and my husband is there, and he's willingly praying with us.

And I remember from the time that he was saved this year, unless he was traveling, he didn't miss a single community group. I invited him to join our community group.

[6 : 32] And he gladly joined, and he hasn't missed a single one. And I remember one night, I was feeling tired, and I thought, oh, you know what? Shall we just miss the group tonight?

And no, absolutely not, he says. We are not missing community group. I felt so ashamed. Because I'm usually the one telling him to go to church. Let's go to church before. Now he's the one turning the tables on me.

So I thought that was just amazing. Praise the Lord. And one thing I used to send him, when he was not saved, I would send Bible scriptures to encourage him, which probably didn't mean anything to him.

He just thought maybe it was annoying. I don't know. But now he's sending me Bible scriptures. So I just praise God and thank him for all these wonderful changes, especially in me. A big change in me had to be made.

I had to change the way I speak, the way I act, or be just not my personality, but just follow the Bible's instruction of how I needed to be as a woman.

[7 : 29] And we have peace in our house. We have peace in our home. And it's just wonderful. I had to change. And I didn't realize that. It's hard for South Africans to change, right?

Yeah, yeah. They're just terrible. Wow. Yeah. Hey, we could talk forever and ever about your story. It's amazing the blessings that God has done and the changes.

And I just remember so many times you felt like there was no hope and you just were clinging to God, even though you didn't know if he was there. As you think about this last year or even we're celebrating this third anniversary, what is having the church here?

And I think specifically you have a very amazing community group. Amazing community group.

Yeah, because we keep telling people. Join us. We keep telling people get in community group, get

in community group, but people are like, ah. Oh, yes.

But so what would you say has been a big point of having the church here in your life and then that community group? That community group has really been, I'm telling you, I've leaned on them.

[8 : 31] I cannot imagine not having them in my life. They are really and truly my brothers and sisters. I feel like I'm in a family. I feel like I can call up this one and that one and I don't feel, oh, I'm bothering them in any way.

And it's such a wonderful feeling and it's such a coincidence that I've joined the group because I just couldn't make it to my other group. And I was pregnant and tired and it was right in Kennedy Town and it was close by to walk and I needed to at least feed my spirit.

And I remember this beautiful email that I got from our community group leader, Mike. And he wrote this long email saying, I heard that you wanted to join us and we're just really looking forward to meeting you.

Would you like to join us for a coffee or for lunch? Just let us know when it's convenient for you.

We're happy to meet you. And I thought, oh, thank God. I was so lonely.

I was really desperately lonely. I didn't have any Christian friends. I had another group, but, you know, people are busy. It's Hong Kong. And, you know, you just feel, I just, I don't know.

[9 : 38] There wasn't a connection. And I prayed to God and I said, I cannot anymore. You want me to continue and I promised you I will never leave you again like you promised you would never leave me.

But this is hard. I've got, I'm two children, a husband that's not saved. I'm pregnant. I just feel exhausted. And I need friends.

I need a family, a Christian family. I'm alone here. I'm far away from my family in South Africa.

Please send me someone. Please send me friends, Christian friends, if you need, if you want me to continue.

And he sent me Kennedy Town Community Group. They hounded me. They wouldn't leave me alone. Like I won't leave you alone. All of you come join us. And it was wonderful.

If they didn't do that, I would have been, I don't know what would have happened to me. Because, I mean, they, they, the love. Yeah. There is so much love there.

[10 : 36] And it's not even for, you don't have to force yourself. You can feel that when you're in that group, people love each other. We love each other. And it's such a wonderful, generous, caring. And this email really touched my heart.

I burst into tears again. I cried when I read that email where they welcomed me. And, and, and, um, it was just, it's just really wonderful.

Like when you're in a family and you, your brother and sister, is there something going on? You haven't seen them for a while. And you say, hey, where are you? You keep on calling them. And that's what they did to me.

And, and it just, I don't know, it just made a huge difference. And they are the ones who brought me to Watermark Church. And I haven't looked back since. Watermark Church, I have to say, has also been, it's like a family year.

I cannot imagine not attending Watermark Church. I feel like I'm home. I feel like this is my church. And this is exactly how you have to feel when you come to church. Everybody says, hi, how are you?

[11 : 36] Welcome. And there's this genuine love here. And you can feel the Holy Spirit here. And I'm just so pleased. All of this is a testament of how God was just wanting me to hold on so that he could bless me with Watermark and with our community, my community group, and with my brothers and sisters here.

Amen. Thank you. That's great. I'm going to, I'm going to, yeah, that's amazing what God is doing. I remember one time you told me, God, I feel like this group in this church is like a bulldog. Exactly. They've clamped on to me and they're not letting go.

They wouldn't let go of me. Thank God they didn't. Thank God. Can I pray for you guys? Yeah.

Yeah. Father, please thank you for what you do in Joey's story, Elena's story of coming back and of finding, you finding him and you opening his eyes to your son.

And just the changes. And we know that there's always highs and lows and low points. And we just pray that they would always look back at your faithfulness, as we were just saying, 10,000 reasons.

And they would never doubt your goodness and that you're there, even in the hard and difficult times. And so I thank you for this dear, precious family. I pray for their three kiddos, the African tribe. I pray that they would increase in Hong Kong, maybe not with brothers and sisters, but with friends who would fall in love with Jesus.

[12 : 49] And they would plant their own church one day, a South African Hong Kong church. And so, Father, we just thank you for what you're doing in their life. And we love you. And we pray these things in your son Jesus' name.

Amen. Thank you. Today's scripture reading comes from the book of Philippians, chapter 1, verses 12 to 30. Please follow along in your bulletins as we read a portion of this letter from the Apostle Paul.

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.

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

[14 : 02] What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice.

For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, to die is gain. 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. My desire is to depart and to be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

So 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.

[15 : 17] Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you, that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

This is the reading of God's word. Good morning, everyone. Good morning, everyone.

Good morning. Happy birthday, Watermark. Happy birthday, Watermark. Happy birthday. There we go. We're waking up now.

My name, if you don't know me, my name is Eric Scott. I am the youth guy here, and as I guess may sort of be a prerequisite for the youth guy job, I sometimes do crazy and stupid things.

[16 : 36] Things that if I thought through them ahead of time, I would not have done, but fail to think through them ahead of time and thus end up doing them. About three years ago, I was at a cookout at my friend Alfie's house.

He's on staff here at Watermark, and his dad came up to me, and he said, Eric, I have two questions for you, one about fitness and one about availability. Now, as I'm sure you can guess, he wasn't just asking as a friend how I'm doing in terms of my fitness level.

No, he had ulterior motives, and he said to me, I am signed up for this hike called the Trail Walker. Some of you know.

The Trail Walker is a 100-kilometer hike starting in Saikung going to Toon Moon. You do it in one straight shot, and you need a team of four, and his team only had three.

He said, we want you to be our fourth. Do you think that you're in good enough shape to do this, and do you have time to train with us? I said, I'm not really sure. Can I maybe do a trial hike and see if I can keep up with you guys?

[17 : 43] He's like, sure. I met up with them at Parkview one Saturday morning. We hiked to Stanley and then back to Quarry Bay. As we're getting back to Quarry Bay, I told them, that's it.

I quit. I'm done. Forget about this. They said, no, Eric. You did a great job. You kept up with us the entire way. We really think you'd be great on this team. Somehow convinced me to come back for a second hike.

Then it just never ended. I ended up being a part of that team. In preparation for the Trail Walker, you do a lot of training. You hike up hills and down hills and up more hills and down hills.

You go from point A to point B, but you don't just take a straight line. You go out and around and up over hills. Even though A to B is just flat and straight and easy, you go up and over hills and around and take the most out-of-the-way direction that you can to get there because you've got to get in shape.

You go around and you find clothes that are comfortable. You try out different clothes combinations to see what works and doesn't work. You plan out for the day of the event, where are we going to eat? Where are we going to take rests?

[18 : 49] Where are we going to change our clothes? Because you don't want to go 100K in the same clothes. You switch out to dry stuff along the way. Finally, after all that training, after all that preparation, you show up and it's the day of the Trail Walker.

You've got 100 kilometers to go. From the moment that that race starts, your mind is fixed on one goal. Everything that you do, everything that you think, everything that you say is done with the purpose of reaching that finish line.

At some point, you may feel this burst of energy, but you don't run on ahead because you know that you're going to need to conserve that energy. You have your eyes fixed on this goal and you do everything for the purpose of achieving that one goal.

You press on. You get tired, but you keep going. By the time you reach the end of your 100 kilometers, for some people, some insane people do it in 11 1/2 hours.

You're allowed up to 48. My group took 26 hours. By the time you reach the end of your 100 kilometers, you are sweaty, you are gross, you are smelly, you are tired, exhausted, physically and emotionally.

[20 : 06] It's as much a mental battle as a physical one. But you are all of these things because your goal has not been to look pretty for the ladies for the last 100 kilometers. Your goal has not been to smell pretty for the ladies for the last 100 kilometers.

Your goal hasn't been to be comfortable. Your goal has been to reach the finish line. And you reach that finish line and you have achieved your goal. And this single focus that you have while you're on that trail, it's something that's relatively short-lived.

It lasts maybe a day, two days. But for some people, they live their lives with this type of singular focus. And one person in the Bible who is a very great example of what it looks like to live life with this singular focus is a man named Paul.

For those of you who don't know about Paul, he started out as someone whose job it was to go around and arrest and or kill Christians. He was on the road one day, headed to a town called Damascus, ready to arrest some more Christians, when all of a sudden, God appeared to him and said, why are you persecuting me?

Paul was like, who is this talking to me? And the voice says, I am Jesus who you are persecuting. And from that day on, Paul's life was transformed. From that day on, Paul trusted in Jesus.

[21 : 31] Paul made it his goal in everything that he did in life to live for Jesus, to know Jesus, to tell people about Jesus. He traveled around and he would start churches. And as he traveled around, he would write letters to some of the churches that he had started before to keep in touch with them, check in on how they're doing, sometimes correct some problems that were happening in these churches.

And one of those letters has been saved in our Bible as the book of Philippians. It was written to a church in a town called Philippi. That's why they call it the Philippians.

And Philippians is unique for Paul's letters. In a lot of Paul's letters, he writes to the churches and he says, you know, you guys have this major problem. Here's how to fix it.

With Philippians, there are some minor issues at the church, but in general, he's writing to them saying, you guys are doing good. Keep it going. Stay strong. Follow Christ. Here's how I'm doing.

Thanks for your help in my ministry. It's a positive, encouraging letter on the whole. And one theme that comes out again and again and again and again throughout the book of Philippians is Paul's single focus in life on knowing Christ, on living for Christ and on making Christ famous throughout the world.

[22 : 48] And so for the next four weeks here at Watermark, we are going to be looking through the book of Philippians, looking at this single focus in Paul's life and we're going to be looking at it from a number of different angles. And today, we're starting out at the very beginning, which is a good place to start, in chapter one.

If we jump in chapter one, he starts out with a greeting for his friends. Here's, you know, I'm thankful for you guys. I love you guys. And in verse 12, he starts updating them on what's going on in his life at this time.

And that's where we're going to start out. He says, 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.

And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. So we see here, as Paul is writing this letter to his friends, he is sitting in prison.

But he doesn't, he's not just sitting there wasting away. He has a single goal in life of knowing Christ and making Christ known. So while he is in prison, what is he doing? He's telling everyone in the prison about Jesus.

[23 : 59] This is great irony. They put Paul in prison to try and captivate him and captivate his message, but in the process, they actually gave him a captive audience who couldn't run away when he started talking to them.

And Paul is in this prison, he's talking to the guards, and he's excited because through his time in prison, all of the guards have gotten to hear about Jesus. And he's saying, me being in prison, that's not a bad thing, that's a good thing.

Everyone here has heard about Jesus. And not only that, but the other Christians that are outside the prison, they heard about me being put here, and they have been encouraged to share their faith as well.

So I don't need to be out there because everyone else is out there and the fact that I'm in here is making them more excited about telling everyone else in their world about Jesus. He says, yeah, some of them have good motives, some have bad motives, but regardless of the motives, they're telling their friends about Jesus.

Jesus is being made famous and in that, I will rejoice. Paul has a single focus in life of knowing Jesus and making him known. And because of that single focus, he is rejoicing even though he is locked up in prison, even though he is stuck there and can't leave, even though he sees that this imprisonment could lead to his death.

[25 : 20] As we move forward in this chapter, he explicitly states what this goal in life is. If you move forward to chapter, or verse 19, he says, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Paul's goal is to honor Christ in everything that he does. As he looks at his current circumstances, locked up in this prison, he doesn't look around and say, I'm uncomfortable.

I'm hungry. I wish that I could sleep in my own bed at night and be free to go be with my friends. No, he says, my goal is that Jesus would be made famous through everything in my life.

If I live, I want Jesus to be made famous through that. If I get killed, I want Jesus to be made famous through that. Regardless of what happens to me, regardless of what people think about me, if my life and my death can make Jesus famous, that for me is a win.

He continues on by saying, for to me, to live is Christ. Paul's focus in life was so single, so focused, that if he boiled down his entire life to one word, the word that he chose to describe his life is Christ.

[27 : 03] Now, we live in Hong Kong. We understand the concept, I think most of us at least, understand this concept of having a single focus in life. We've got bankers and lawyers who will spend 100 plus hours a week at the office.

That is a single focus in life. A couple months ago, there was an article in the South China Morning Post about a top banker in Hong Kong who had dropped dead from stress from overwork.

The article said, this is actually something that's happened a number of times in the past couple years in Hong Kong, that bankers have just overworked themselves to the point that their bodies physically cannot handle it anymore and they have dropped dead from stress from overwork.

And the article speculated that banking in Hong Kong is more and more becoming a test of endurance not just in terms of whether you can do the job but in terms of whether your body can handle the stress of the job.

And the article was speculating that more and more it won't be a question of can this person do the job but can this person's body take the stress without them dropping dead to qualify whether you can be a successful banker in Hong Kong.

[28 : 16] Now that type of a situation only exists in a city where people live with a single focus. The single focus of being successful at work the single focus of making lots and lots of money the single focus of being the best.

We understand what it looks like to live with a single focus but do we understand what it looks like to live with a single focus on Christ?

For Paul this meant that everything that he did in life was done with the goal of honoring Christ. Every word that he said every night that he spent in prison every time that he got beaten for sharing his faith every time that he got run out of cities for sharing his faith he did it with a single goal. He didn't look back in despair and say oh I wish I could have made more friends in that city so I could have been more popular. No he had a single goal. I want Jesus to be made famous through my life.

To live is Christ and so in everything that I do that is what I want. What would it look like if in our lives we could truly say to live is Christ if we took the word Christ out of this statement to live is what?

[30 : 02] For Paul he goes on and he strengthens this statement he follows it up with another statement that I think is shocking. He says to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Now I want to correct a possible misunderstanding here. Paul is not sitting here in prison despairing oh my life sucks so bad I wish I could just be free from all the troubles that are going on right now. death is gain because it's a means of escape. That is not what Paul is saying. And I know for some people in here right now it could be a tough time in life and it could be very tempting to read this passage in that way.

But hear me that is not what Paul is saying. And if you are going through a time like that where you're struggling saying I don't know what's going on in life I really wish I had a means of escape. We have an amazing pastoral care ministry here at Watermark. And I would strongly recommend that you get in touch with them. The email address is in the bulletin. It's care at watermarkchurch.hk and we would love to get you connected with them so you can find help.

[31 : 14] But that is not what Paul is saying. Paul is not saying I see death as a means of escape. No, if you look at what he's saying he's saying I'm rejoicing, I'm happy, I'm excited about what is happening in my life.

To live is Christ but I see death as something even better than that. The word gain here actually means getting something, attaining something that you don't already have.

as Paul looks at his life he says life is amazing, I'm rejoicing, Jesus is being made famous, my life is Christ but death is gain because in my death I will obtain something that I don't yet have or maybe more accurately I'll obtain more of something that I already have.

See Paul's statement that to die is gain is building on his statement that to live is Christ because to live is Christ and to die is more Christ. To die is to be free from the sin that separates us from Christ.

To die is to be with Christ and have what we have right now on a greater, grander, more majestic scale.

[32 : 27] And that is why Paul can sit there in this prison and say to live is Christ to die is gain because he sees that as a hope. He sees the promise of something greater.

As Paul says this, we have to understand that this statement to die is gain is deeply, deeply rooted in Paul's belief in a literal, literal, physical resurrection from the dead.

Paul in his teachings clearly teaches that Jesus' resurrection, physical, in a body, is the model for what will happen for us as Christians someday.

That there will be a physical resurrection. That this life, when we die, that's not the end, but there's more. We'll have new bodies just like Jesus. We will be with Jesus.

We will be free from the sin that plagues us in this life. We'll be free from the suffering that plagues us in this life. And Paul held on to that belief, held on to that hope.

[33 : 29] He believed that when he died, it would be gained because he would have this new body. He would have this new relationship with Jesus. For Paul, the real distinction going on right here is not life and death.

It's life and more life. It's Jesus and more Jesus. And so Paul writes this letter from a prison with hope because he sees that Jesus is so much greater than anything that the Romans can do to him to try and stop him from spreading this message.

So as I looked at this passage this week and I thought about what would this look like in my life if I lived with this singular passion? How could I live with this singular passion?

And what am I supposed to do with Paul's statements about this singular passion? It has for me to do and I'm excited to keep doing that. But I know that I have this hope that someday in the future it will be even better.

And as I thought about what this could look like in our lives I was reminded of the story of one of my friends Justin and so I've asked him to come share with us a little bit today about his story.

[34 : 46] the first thing I asked Justin to do is I asked him to take this statement to live as Christ and to die as gain and to cut the words Christ and to die out of that statement.

You have a card on your seat. I basically asked him to fill in the blanks on that card. And Justin what was the answer? You can sit down if you want but you don't have to. What was the answer that you gave for that?

My answer is to leave is to win and approval is gain. And so you said you filled in the same words for before and after you became a Christian right?

Right. But what did those words mean to you before you became a Christian? Before I was a Christian to win means to win competitions between peers.

So I raised in a family where my parents have high expectations of me and my siblings. I have twin sisters Edie. That's why I always get involved in sibling competitions.

[35 : 51] My mom expects me to get 100 marks even if I get 99.9. So and my definition of approval is that I understand that victory precedes approval for my families, for my siblings, and for my friends and everybody who knows me.

and I eagerly waited for next chance to prove myself, to prove my value and my worth. I wanted to prove to people that I'm able to achieve.

And this determination and drive has motivated me to be more excellent and to be better. And to be better, at least I feel about myself and I never want to let go of this motivation, at least.

Yeah. So can you tell us the story of the night when you met Jesus? Yeah. So there's one time that I was engaged in a debating competition and I lost a debate and my coach Edmund brought me to a dinner place and he started sharing about Christianity and his determination and drive to teach in my school.

He talked about his relationship with Christ which is really weird to me because I've never imagined a relationship with somebody that you don't get to see. And so he spoke powerful words to me.

[37 : 16] He pointed at people around me, these people who are powerful, wealthy, of high setting society and he said this, everyone is sinful and he literally says everyone.

And I was like, these people are exactly the people I want to be. These people are successful and it might drive in determination is I want to be people like this and if your statement is true then all my hope in this world has vanished.

And so I'm really serious about his sentence. I want to defend whether I want to prove him wrong. And so I kept thinking about this and he shared about what sin is and what Christianity is and he shared about his experience in the business world and how he could get glamour and wealth in the business world but now his calling is to teach and how he removed himself from the business world to a teaching field.

And that shows me a great example of what Christ is and the single purpose and single focus of a Christian life. It's where you want to follow a calling instead of to get approval which was something

I wanted to get.

And so Edmund took time to get to know you guys and talk with you guys about Jesus. Edmund is a really dedicated teacher. He spent a lot of time coaching me about debating.

[38 : 47] Sometimes I kept him until 9 o'clock at 10 just for my training and he sometimes just told me a joke like, Justin, you have to let me go. If not, tomorrow I will be single. Yeah, I just want to throw a comment in there.

Justin is an amazing example of what can happen when we take time to invest in young people's lives. I want to encourage you guys, if you aren't doing this already, find some young people around the church that you can get involved in and invest in because it really does make a difference in their lives.

So Justin, after that evening, how did your definition of winning and approval change? My newfound definition of to win is to win spiritual battles with the power of God.

I mean, there are divisions, chapter 6, verse 10 says, finally be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might, put in the whole armor of God, that you might be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

So I mean, now as a Christian, the single purpose of life is to fight a battle, the spiritual battle with the power of God. And my newfound definition of approval is also different in the sense that this approval is not from people, is from Jesus, is from God, where this is not achieved by my own power, it's achieved by Jesus dying on the cross.

[40 : 07] And I have to trust that, I have to put my trust in Jesus and believe that his power is greater than mine and I can rely on his power in everything I do. And as you think about how these definitions change for you, can you share with us an example of a time since you became a Christian where that made a difference in your life?

I want to share an experience about me getting into an interview for an outstanding student award competition where I got a really personal interview from the judges.

So I was asked questions about my personal belief, where I find value in, and also questions for me to talk about myself eventually.

And so there is a struggle between me about should I manipulate the performance to hide my weaknesses and present like a perfect Justin to the judges or should I be honest about myself to accept who I am as son of God and to just present my whatever I am and find satisfaction who I am. So it's this struggle to gain approval from the judges or the approval of God. And I knew exactly if I want to present myself honestly, I might have to fall short of their expectations.

[41 : 28] I might have to lose the competition. But eventually I come up with this. It's better to have an impact on these judges and fall short of their expectations than to hide the light. Because I want to shine a light and have a strong impact on them.

I think that's more important. awesome. Thanks for sharing. Is there anything else you wanted to say? All right. Thanks for sharing. Thank you. I think that's an awesome picture of the impact that living with this singular focus in life makes.

And so as we come close to the close today, I want us to think about what it is that we are living for. On each of your chairs we put a little card. It looks like this, only smaller.

It says, to live is blank. Blank is gain. As we go throughout our weeks this week, I want us to take some time and think about what do we put in the blank in our lives.

Because, at least for me, I know that far too often the words that go here are not Christ and the words that go here are not to die. If I'm being really honest, more often it probably says, to live is success.

[42 : 43] Continued excellence at everything is gain. As I look at the story of the gospel and think about who God is and what he's done, I realize that when I come to him for salvation, he doesn't care about my success.

He doesn't want my success. Actually, the only thing I contribute to my salvation is my failure to obey him and my need for him to save me.

And that he saves me not only despite my failures, but because of my failures. My failures are what makes me need a savior. And success isn't a bad thing.

Excellence isn't a bad thing. But when I take them and I make them ultimate in life, I live in a way that contradicts the gospel I say I believe. And so my challenge for you is think through what goes in the blanks in your life.

And how do you know if the answers you gave are accurate? Someone pointed out to me this week that what we're living for will determine what we are willing to suffer for. I think for a lot of us in this room, we'd be willing to suffer for a better paycheck.

[43 : 58] For a lot of us in this room, we'd be willing to suffer for more popularity. We'd be willing to suffer to save face. Would we be willing to suffer for Christ?

Another question I have is if in the next month you were to lose something really valuable, would that prove or disprove the accuracy of what you put down here?

If you say you're living for Christ and the stock market crashes in the next month, will your response validate the fact that you're living for Christ? Or will it actually say that in reality to live is money, profit is gain, to live is happiness, comfort is gain?

How are our lives backing up what we say we're living for? And another thing that has been very, very challenging for me this week is someone mentioned an excellent way to test the truthfulness of the answers we put down here is to ask close friends and family members what they would put in these spaces if they filled it in for us.

It's going to be a little bit scary. It can be a little bit painful. But I figured I should apply this truth to my own life before trying to teach it to everyone else here.

[45 : 28] So I asked a number of friends this week, what would you put in these spaces in my life if you had to do that? And some of my friends apparently think that I am the Apostle Paul.

They gave these glowing responses and I don't know where they came from. But one friend gave a startling, painfully true answer.

This friend said, you want to be known and approved of. You want people to be impressed with you. You want to impress yourself. As I read those words, it stung. It hurt because I knew that they were true.

But it's a good thing because in seeing that, in realizing that about myself, I can see again more clearly where I need Jesus. I haven't made it yet.

I want to be able to say to live is Christ, to die is gain. But if I'm being honest most of the time, that's not what my life reflects. I'm trying.

[46 : 34] I hope I'm making progress. I hope all of us are making progress. But as we think about this, as we see the ways that our lives are not Christ and we see other things besides Christ's gain, it will show us more clearly.

the ways that we need Jesus. It will show us more clearly the ways that Jesus is still in the process of working on us and it will drive us back to him for forgiveness and salvation because he offers it to us.

Our answers to this don't determine whether or not God loves us. The cross is our proof once and for all that God does love us. So my challenge for you this week is think this through.

What is life? What is gain? If you're here today and you're not a Christian, I also want to challenge you to fill this in. I don't expect that if you're a Christian you would want the answer, or yeah, if you're not a Christian, I don't expect you would want the answers to say to live is Christ, to die is gain.

My challenge for you if you're not a Christian is fill this in and take it one step further. Play out the logical conclusion of whatever you put in the gaps. Say you're living for happiness.

[47 : 43] You see comfort is gain. How long will that last you? If the stock market crashes tomorrow, how is this picture going to hold up?

Even if you can be happy your entire life, where does it leave you when you die? If to live is money and profit is gain, what hope does that give you?

The more I think about it, the more I realize living for Jesus is the only thing that's going to last.

Living for Jesus is the only thing that's going to give us a continued hope, to give us continued gain, not just in this life, but also in the next one.

I think that is why Paul had this singular focus. That's why Paul sat in this prison and said, I don't care that I'm in chains, I'm rejoicing. Because despite my chains, and even because of my chains, the word of Christ is being preached.

People are hearing about Jesus. People are hearing this good news. People are falling in love with him. And in that, I will rejoice. Because for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

[49 : 02] Let's pray. Father, we thank you. We thank you for the cross. We thank you for Jesus and for your love for us.

We thank you that life can be about knowing you. That we don't have to live for things that are going to pass away, that are going to fail us, but that we can live for Christ.

I pray that as we go throughout our weeks, we would think about this truth. We would discover the ways that our lives fall short of that calling. That we would discover more and more what it looks like and what it means to follow you and fall in love with you.

God, please let it be true of us that to live is Christ and to die is gain. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.