

Living for Him

Many gifts from God, as our lives and the air we breathe, are absolutely free. Whether we are thankful to God and live for him and for others is wholly in our hands.

1. Thankfulness

Some people believe that God exists but are not thankful to him (Romans 1:21; Hebrews 11:6). Webster defines the word "thankful" as "impressed with a sense of kindness received; ready to acknowledge it; grateful." To be thankful is "not feeling or expressing thanks; not acknowledging favors."

After Jesus had healed 10 men of leprosy, only one of them, a Samaritan, "when he saw that he was healed, turned back and praised God with a loud voice, and fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks" (Luke 17:15-16). Nine of those he had healed were thankful, and Jesus asked, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was none found to return to give God the glory, except this foreigner?" (Luke 17:17-18).

A song written three thousand years ago is timeless:

Shout joyfully to Yahweh, all the earth! Serve Yahweh with gladness. Come before Him with singing. Know that Yahweh, He is God. He made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name, for Yahweh is good, His kindness is everlasting, and His faithfulness is from generation to generation. (Psalm 100)

Paul was thankful "that Christ Jesus came into the world, to save sinners, of whom I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15), yet Jesus loved him, and gave himself for Paul (Galatians 2:20). "Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

Christians are exhorted to give "thanks to God, even the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20). "Give thanks for everything, which is God's will in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

2. LIVING FOR OTHERS

Jesus not only died for others (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15), but he is also a prime example of living for others: He "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38).

To believing, penitent hearts (Acts 2:38; 16:31), as their bodies are raised from the water of baptism (Acts 10:47; Colossians 2:12), Christ has become their "everything" (Colossians 3:11). Redeemed sinners ("all have sinned," Romans 3:23) realize that if "one died for the sake of all, then all were dead" (2 Corinthians 5:14). "[H]e died for the sake of all, that the living should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for their sake, and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Living for the Lord includes daily Bible reading (Colossians 1:10), daily praying (Romans 12:12), a weekly observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), a weekly contribution (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) and living for others as a "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1), and being ready for every good work (Titus 3:1, 8, 14). No matter how selfish and self-centered a sinner was before his baptism, a Christian cannot, and does not want to, live "to himself" (Romans 14:7). Just as Jesus went about doing good, on the mind of every alert Christian is "What can I do today to help somebody?"

Those who live for Jesus not only live to serve other Christians but also look for opportunities to serve non-Christians. Paul taught: "Therefore, as we have an opportunity, let us do what is good to everyone, especially to those who belong to the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10), helping needy saints and showing hospitality (Romans 12:13).

Some at Corinth in A.D. 51 who heard Paul's preaching, believed it and were baptized (Acts 18:8), were of "the household of Stephanas," a whole family who "set [tasso] themselves to serve the saints" (1 Corinthians 16:15). The King James Version says that "they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints." The word "addict" (Latin, addere) means "to give oneself over to a thing, and generally in a bad sense" (Webster). The word is used in reference to alcoholics or those given over to drugs. However, the King James Version uses the word in a good sense, that the Stephanas family "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints."

Sadly, some Christians allow selfishness to take over, and live only for themselves. Phygelus and Hermogenes "abandoned" Paul (2 Timothy 1:15). Demas, who had been one of Paul's "fellow workers" (Philemon 24), deserted him "having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10).

On the other hand, most Christians crucify selfishness, living for their Lord and for others: "They who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24). During Paul's three years (Acts 20:31) at Ephesus (A.D. 54-57), a Christian named Onesiphorus served Paul in such a way that he could write to Timothy: "You know very well the ways [Onesiphorus] served me in Ephesus" (2 Timothy 1:18).

Later, during Paul's last days in chains in the Mamertine Prison at Rome, in a three-quarter cellar with a tiny window opening toward a cemetery (A.D. 67-68), Onesiphorus was also in Rome, more than 600 miles away from his home in Ephesus. In 67 A.D. Paul wrote that "when [Onesiphorus] was in Rome, he searched diligently and found me. ...[H]e often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chains" (2 Timothy 1:16-17). Paul appreciated his good friend, and, apparently after Onesiphorus had died, Paul penned two prayers about him in a letter to Timothy: "May the Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus," and "May the Lord grant that he may find mercy from the Lord in that day" (2 Timothy 1:16, 18). Paul also asked Timothy to greet the family of Onesiphorus (verse 19). In conclusion, "None of us lives to himself, and none dies to himself. If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. Whether therefore we live or die we belong to the Lord" (Romans 14:7-8).

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