

A woman named Carol is diagnosed as having MS in her 30's after the birth of her son. For 30 plus years, Carol suffers loss of strength and motor skills. She wears diapers and drives an amigo. A hooyer lift has to be used to take her from her amigo to sit in a chair in her living room. Her speech is garbled. Her husband divorces her and he dies. She does not have a close relationship with her two children. Many would say, "A wasted life". But Carol would say, "Because of this, I rejoice!" What?

A little 7 year old girl named Ryanna is struck down with an aggressive leukemia. She undergoes intensive chemotherapy. Shortly after her first batch of chemotherapy, she develops a severe pain in her stomach area. It turns out to be a serious infection. She is helicoptered from a Flint hospital to the University of Michigan hospital, and spends weeks in intensive care fighting for life. Her parents are devastated to think about the loss of their child. And yet, Mark and Stephanie are able to say, "Because of this, I rejoice. What?"

How can these two stories have people that are so upbeat and positive? How can these people have a heart painted with joy? I mean, I want some of that joy. You can. It all depends on your perspective toward life, and what your real purpose for being here is. You see, for a Christian, life and death is always a win/win proposition for whether we live or die, we win. If we live, no matter what the circumstance, we live to glorify Jesus Christ with our lives, to serve Him, and spread the good news message that He is our Savior and Lord. And when we die, we go through the portal of death to a life in heaven. So let's plug in a new focus today about life and death. As Christians, lift your chin up today, and smile, we are in "A win/win Situation!"

The Christians in Philippi must have wondered what was going on. The apostle Paul was locked up in prison, they had no idea if Paul would survive or not. What's worse they wondered how this would all effect them. The apostle was in prison facing the possibility of a death penalty. Would people even bother listening to the gospel if their best-known and most eloquent supporter – St. Paul – was a prisoner of the state? It seemed that the Christian church was on the "outs". But Paul tells them, "Because of this situation, I rejoice!"

The truth is that Paul's imprisonment actually became a tool in God's hands. God worked through Paul's stay in Rome to advance the gospel. The Palace Guard was specifically assigned to guard Paul. This was a detachment of elite imperial troops. They served as the emperor's bodyguard. As Paul awaited his trial in Rome, he became acquainted with many of the soldiers of the palace guard. These soldiers began to realize that Paul was no ordinary prisoner, and certainly not a criminal. It became clear that Paul was simply a prisoner because of his connection to Jesus Christ. His only crime was that he proclaimed the gospel. The guard members spoke about Paul's case with each other, with their families, and with others in Rome. As a result, the gospel of Christ was being shared. Paul's case became "front page news." It was the talk of Rome.

Paul realized something as he sat in prison. He could have felt sorry for himself, doubted God's love and guidance, or he could take advantage of the opportunity to make a friend and share the name of Jesus. Paul trusted that the Lord would provide for all of his needs in life. It's as he wrote to the Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

The apostle Paul lists the reason he had this opportunity to speak boldly, even in the face of uncertainty and danger: "For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." Did you catch the reason? Paul

admits that his boldness was the result of the Philippians who prayed for him. They prayed that God would give Paul the strength and boldness to take advantage of opportunity to share Jesus, even though he was in chains.

The reason they prayed was because they trusted the Holy Spirit would give Paul the words needed to share the name of Jesus with those who imprisoned him. The Spirit was using Paul to glorify Christ. It's fairly certain that you won't ever be thrown in prison because you're a Christian, but God promises that everything you face will turn out for your deliverance. Your situation will provide an opportunity to glorify Christ your Savior. Your situation will provide opportunities to share your faith in Christ with others. Your situation will provide you with an opportunity to deepen your relationship with the Lord in His Word. Your situation will be an opportunity to develop greater patience and dependence on God. That means the Lord might allow you to be placed in an unsavory place to accomplish his goal. He might put you in line at the unemployment office, so that you might talk with someone there who needs the hope of Christ. He might put you in the hospital because a nurse, a doctor, or a fellow-patient could benefit from your confidence in Jesus as your Savior. The Lord might put a co-worker in your office that loudly proclaims his unbelief in God, just so you have an opportunity to give a reason for the hope you have.

Too often we're tempted to doubt God and wonder if he knows what's best for our lives. We might wonder why God allows sickness, unemployment, or a family crisis to enter our lives. Yet, God tells us exactly why these things often happen – it's his way to give us an opportunity to glorify him and praise him in the storm. The Lord may lead us to face a tough situation – unemployment, hospital stay, or death in the family – as a chance for us to pray for one another. And in this way we rally around each other and build up the unity of the Spirit.

Back to little Ryanna. I have been posting her condition to my friends on Facebook. In my entire ministry, I have never witnessed so many people praying for a little girl. Cards are being sent to Ann Arbor to Ryanna's room throughout the United States. Christ's love for that little child is being poured out by you and others. Mark and Stephanie are in awe of the love of God's people, and how God has intervened in this situation. We are all standing together with Mark and Stephanie as they face this trial. We are standing firm in one spirit.

Paul urges the Philippian Christians to do the same. He urges them to stand firm in one Spirit. He says, "I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of gospel." "Stand firm in one spirit" is actually an athletic phrase. "Stand firm" is an athletic term that creates the image of a defensive stance. Like the goalie in soccer, who has to stand firm to prevent the opponent from scoring a point, the Christian must stand firm in the face of conflict or adversity. And we are to stand firm together. Enjoy the fellowship we share as members of God's family. I have heard some people make statements such as, "I don't have to go to church to be a Christian. I can worship God alone on the beach or in the mountains." Well, that is true. We can worship God alone, and I hope we all do that from time to time. But that is not all that there is to being a Christian. Being a Christian also means sticking together, not just worshipping together, but also sticking together even in conflict and trouble; praying for each other and offering to help one another to remain strong in Christ. So, stand firm and know that God will turn this situation out for your deliverance.

St. Paul wasn't sure what would happen whether he would be released from prison or put to death. Yet, that didn't matter. God would deliver him. Paul knew he was a new creation by God's grace. In baptism he had put on Christ. He lived everyday in the knowledge of forgiveness – his sins were covered with Jesus' blood. St. Paul drew his strength for daily living from Christ

Jesus. His constant desire was to know Jesus more deeply and to serve him more completely.

If our lives are rooted in Christ, then we'll share the apostle's view on death. It's true that we all love this life with its blessings and opportunities, but we will look forward to the gain that will be ours in death.

Yes for a Christian, death is a gain. So what do we gain? First of all, we gain eternal life, never again having to experience death. It says in Revelation, "God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, sadness, crying or pain, because the old order of things has passed away." Did you catch the first "no more"? There will be no more death. Can you imagine a world with no more death, only life? If you can, you can imagine heaven.

What have you done today to avoid death? Likely a lot. You've popped pills, pumped pecks, passed on the pie, pursued polyunsaturates. Why? Because you are worried about staying alive. That won't be a worry in heaven.

In fact, you won't be worrying at all. Moms worry about their kids getting hurt on earth. You won't worry in heaven. In heaven we will feel no pain. Some of you fellows worry about getting old. You won't in heaven. We'll be ceaselessly strong. You travelers worry about the plane crashing. You won't in heaven. Heaven has no planes that I know of. If it does, they don't crash.

The second gain from death is righteousness. The word righteousness means simply to be in the right relationship with God. It is true that as Christians we are righteous right now. When God the father looks at us for the sake of what his Son Jesus did for us, we are righteous in His sight. We are clothed with Christ and his Righteousness. We belong to Him. HE owns us.

But when we die, you might say the relationship will be made even righter. Our wardrobe will be complete. We will be crowned with righteousness. You see on this earth there is still something that prevents people from being rightly related to God. What is that? That's right, sin. Heaven will be sin-free.

Because of sin, the young are abused and the elderly forgotten. Because of sin, God is cursed and drugs are worshiped. Because of sin, the poor have less and the affluent want more. Because of sin, babies have no daddies and husbands have no wives. But in heaven, sin will have no power,; in fact sin will have no presence. There will be no sin.

Death is a gain too, because it means a new body for us when Jesus returns. The Bible says, "He will change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." A new and improved body. That is a gain. No exercise or diet needed.

Still another gain is the family fellowship we will enjoy. All of us live in this world of a dissolving family circle. Mother is gone – Father is gone, or a child is gone, or our beloved grandparents are gone, or a close friend is gone. But the circle is unbroken in heaven forever and ever.

Finally, we gain a better home. Earthly homes need new roofs, new windows, new siding, new plumbing, constant painting and wallpapering. Our home in heaven does not need any repairs. It is a mansion like none other. In death, we are winners!

So, whether we live or die, we are in a win/win situation. The sun won't always shine on our vacation. Our favorite sports team won't always win. Yet, life is a time of fruitful labor for us. Opportunity after opportunity to give God glory in whatever we do. Opportunity to give witness of our faith to others. Death too is great gain. So, don't fear the C Word. Our Lord either takes the cancer from us or takes us from the cancer. We are always winners in Christ. It doesn't get any better than this. And because of this I rejoice and you should too!