**PAUL’S AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

***The Book of Philippians***

Have you ever tried to sum up the life of a man who seemed larger than life?

Carl Sandburg wrote what many call the greatest biography of Abraham Lincoln ever written. It took him six volumes to do it. *Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (2 volumes), followed by the Pulitzer Prize winning *Lincoln: The War Years* (4 volumes), beautifully described the great man who brought us through the Civil War and immortally said, “*that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth*.” It is truly worth reading, first for yourself, and then to your children, for Sandburg said he primarily wrote it for them.

Similar large biographies have been written on such historical figures as Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Winston Churchill and many others. I love biographies of great people, for they inspire me to be better than I am.

Sandburg’s *Lincoln* was great. But what about trying to sum up the life of the greatest evangelist who ever lived? How would you succinctly describe the life of the apostle Paul? We don’t have to wait for it to be written or go to press. It already is in print. In fact, Paul wrote it. It is his autobiography. It was written about 1,060 years ago (c. 60 A.D.) and is known as *The Book of Philippians* in your New Testament.

Take a look at the Table of Contents to get a *Cliff’s Notes* version of his life in summary:

Chapter 1 - The Purpose of My Life
Chapter 2 - The Pattern of My Life
Chapter 3 - The Prize of My Life
Chapter 4 - The Power of My Life

**CHRIST: The Purpose Of My Life (Philippians 1:1-30)**Key Verse: “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain … I am hard pressed between two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better*” (1:21-24).

Summary: He looked at life as a continuum, a journey, a destination. Christ was both the center and circumference, the warp and woof of his life. When he says, “*to die is gain*” he is telling us death is not the end, but the beginning. Paul had found his life’s purpose. He is thereby encouraging us to find ours. Have you?

**CHRIST: The Pattern Of My Life (Philippians 2:1-30)**Key Verse: “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus… and that every tongue should confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (2:5-8).

Paul had taken on the mindset of Christ, using the Lord’s humility in giving up His position of power to sacrifice Himself as a servant to others. To confess Christ is to pattern one’s life after Him, thereby becoming a servant to others (see Matt. 20:28). Can you think of a greater servant than Paul, who gladly was willing “*to spend and be spent*” for Christ’s service, becoming “*all things to all men*” to save some (I Cor. 9:22)?

**CHRIST: The Prize Of My Life (Philippians 3:1-21)**Key Verse: “*but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (3:13-14).

Stephen Covey put it this way: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing” (*Seven Habits Of Highly Effective People*). Paul put it this way, “*but one thing I do*…” His past was filled with magnificent accomplishments, both BC (before conversion) and AC (after conversion). But the prize was in front of him and he had not crossed the finish line. Forward. Ever forward. Don’t stop until the goal is won. Jesus is “up there” and is crying the “*upward call*.” No time for a backward glance, only to march forward and upward. Finish the race!

**CHRIST: The Power Of My Life (Philippians 4:1-23)**Key Verse: “*I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (4:12-13).

In his former life as “*the chief of sinners*” Paul had determined to live by his own strength. But that providential rendezvous with Christ on the Damascus Road changed everything. He was done with living an impotent life, allowing Christ to now “*enable*” him (I Tim. 1:12), “*strengthen”* him (2 Tim. 4:17), and “*empower*” him (Eph. 6:10). Like the old Charles Atlas body building ads from my youth, Paul had gone from a 98-pound weakling to a superman. Spiritually he was as strong as Samson! I can be too.

Summary: Paul finished his autobiography with these challenging words: “*The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you*” (4:9). Is it therefore any wonder that we again and again hear Paul challenge us to look carefully at his life and then imitate him?

“*Imitate me even as I imitate Christ*” (I Cor. 11:1)
“*Therefore I urge you, imitate me*” (I Cor. 4:16)
“*Join in following my example… as you have us for a pattern*” (Phil. 3:16)
“*You became followers of us and of the Lord*” (I Thess. 1:6)
“*You know how you ought to follow us… to make ourselves as an example*” (2 Thess 3:7)
“*I obtained mercy that in me first Jesus might show all longsuffering as a pattern to
 those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life*” (I Tim. 1:16)

Paul’s autobiography to the Philippians was supplemented by his twelve other books. Read all of them to get a complete picture. In that incredible life we learn of a terrible sinner who became a tremendous saint, showing us that heaven is clearly within reach for all of us. If I do what Paul did, I will go where Paul went – heaven! (2 Tim. 4:8). I will find the Purpose, Pattern, Prize and Power for my life … all found in Christ.

*The Book of Philippians*, in my humble opinion, should win the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction. It is the best How-To book ever written to find real joy, and purpose, in life.

Read it. See if you also, like me, will give it two thumbs up. 👍👍 – Rick