In 1543 Nicolaus Copernicus published
a mathematical model to show that,
contrary to scientific understanding and church belief,
the Earth revolved around the Sun
and not the other way round.
The Sun was at the centre, not the Earth.
As a result, previously unsolvable problems
in maths, physics and astronomy became solvable.
This 'Copernican revolution' meant that
putting something else at the centre changed everything.
Putting something else at the centre
caused everything else to make sense.

So much of life itself, personally, nationally, internationally,
seems to make no sense at all.
The different aspects of life just don't seem to fit together
as they should;
instead, they orbit chaotically in relation to one another.
The Bible is all about this conundrum,
of why life doesn't seem to work properly,
and it explores it through its understanding of
what we call 'sin'.
Somebody once said that the definition of 'sin' can be found
by looking at the word 'sin' itself.
'SIN': 'S-I-N' has 'I' at the centre. 'I' at the centre.
'Me' at the centre of everything. For me, to live is 'me'.
Ever since the Garden of Eden,
that's the way we human beings naturally live our lives:
'For me, to live is 'me'.'
And so much of our lives, personally, nationally,
internationally, makes no sense.

1500 years before Copernicus,
the apostle Paul underwent his own 'Copernican revolution'.
Like Copernicus, he put something else at the centre,
and it changed everything.
Every other aspect of his life finally started to make sense –
his present, his future, even the reality of his own death.
Three things which contribute to our lives
just not fitting together as they should:
the problems of our present; the uncertainty of our future;
the inevitability of our death.
How can we make these things make sense?

Paul did it by putting something else at the centre.
'For me,' he said, 'to live is Christ'.
He put Christ Jesus at the centre of his life,
in place of himself,
and it changed everything.

Look at the problems of his present –
what, in v.12, he describes as 'what has happened to me'.
And what has happened to him?
He has been arrested for proclaiming the message
about Jesus and thrown into prison.
His present circumstances are as dark and forbidding
as his prison cell.
But look how upbeat he is, in v.13:
'As a result,' he says, 'As a result (of my being imprisoned),
it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard
and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.'

For Paul, ‘to live is Christ’; Jesus is at the centre of his life.
Christ isn’t just one more aspect of his life,
along with all the others,
revolving in contradictory orbits around ‘him’,
bumping into one another in senseless confusion.
No, instead, every other aspect of his life
revolves around Christ in coherent harmony.
And here we see what that looks like.

For Paul, his life is devoted to
sharing the message of Jesus with others;
and now, every four hours,
the guards to whom he is chained are changed,
and he has another set of guards
with whom he can share the message of Jesus.
As he sees it, they are chained to him,
not the other way round!
Putting Christ at the centre
changed everything about his present circumstances.

Take a difficult situation you are facing in your life
at the moment;
then take everything you know about Jesus –
his character, his purposes, his promises;
and then, like a pair of glasses, put all these things on
and look at your present situation
through these ‘Jesus’ lenses.
What happens to the way you see your present
if you put Jesus – his character, his purposes, his promises –
at the centre of your life, instead of yourself?

Then, look at how Paul approached
the unpredictability of his future.
In v.20 we see that he doesn’t know
whether he will be set free from prison or executed,
whether he will live or die.
Imagine living under the pressure of such uncertainty.

But look how clear-sighted he is as he looks ahead,
in vv.24 and 25: ‘it is more necessary for you,’ he says,
‘that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will
remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress
and joy in the faith’.

I am not saying that Christians can predict the future!
Paul might have been wrong.
What I am saying is that, rather than focusing on himself,
and fearfully lamenting his fate,
by putting Jesus at the centre,
he was able to think reasonably, wisely and unselfishly
about his possible future,
in a way which focused on the needs of others
rather than just his own.

Take a concern you have about your future at the moment,
a decision you have to make.
Remind yourself of what you know about Jesus –
his character and purposes –
and ask yourself,
‘What would Jesus do, faced with this decision?’

Reflect on Jesus' concern for others,
and consider how each possible option for you
would affect the other people in your life,
and, again, ask yourself, 'What would Jesus do?'

Then, lastly, look at how Paul approached
the inevitability of his death.
It is this, his attitude to his own death,
which changed everything in Paul's life,
and enabled him to have such a liberated approach
to his present and his future.
In v.21 he says, 'For to me, to live is Christ *and to die is gain*.'
How is he able to see his death as 'gain'?
He tells us in v.23.
It is because to be with Christ is better by far.
To live for ever
in the presence of the most beautiful Person in the universe,
who loves you infinitely and will love you eternally,
is better by far
than anything that life this side of the grave can offer.

When I went to university, I was extremely nervous,
when I first arrived and in the weeks after that.
If I had known then that I would make friends
who, forty-five years later,
would remain the closest of friends,
and that I would meet the love of my life
who, forty-five years later,
would be my wife and the mother of my children,
I would have lived those first weeks
with expectancy and without fear.

The Christian gospel tells us that
when we pass through death,
we will arrive in a place
where we will meet *the* love of our life,
who will love us infinitely and eternally.
He is with us now by his Spirit,
but then we will see him as he is,
and live every day in his presence.
Knowing this, means we can live our lives now
without fear and with expectancy.

Paul was no different to us.
By putting Jesus, not ourselves, at the centre –
the centre of our life, and the centre of our death,
then, like Paul,
we will be able to replace fear with peace and purpose
as we contemplate the problems of our present,
the uncertainty of our future,
and the inevitability of our death.
'For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is [only] gain.'