

NEW GROUND

Title: Part 2 – “You Can't Cross with Your Hands Full”

Date: August 23, 2026

Well, how's everyone doing? Everyone find their back-to-school groove yet? New schedules, new schools, new opportunities. Lots of exciting new stuff this time of year!

If you've got a Bible or the app, go ahead and join me in Philippians chapter 3.

Philippians 3. We're in week two of a collection of messages called New Ground. And the whole idea is that everybody's got a season where everything changes at once and nobody hands you the map. Right? Maybe it's a new job. A new school. A new relationship. A new baby. A new house. The final kid is off to college. Maybe you've come into some unexpected money.

Last week, we stood at the edge of the Jordan River with Joshua and a couple million terrified people after their leader Moses had died, and we said three things. **You name the water**—you tell God the truth about where you are. **You follow the ark, not the map**—you stop demanding the whole plan and you watch for God's presence out ahead of you. And in a new season you have to eventually **get your feet wet**—you take the step before the fear leaves, because the river doesn't part until your foot's already in it. If you missed week one, grab it on the app or the website, because this whole thing builds.

Today we've made it to the water's edge of a new season. But there's a problem nobody warned us about. And it's not the river, it's what's in our hands. Turn to someone next to you and say, “Open your hands!”

Let me read our text from Philippians 3, starting in verse 7:

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him... [Drop down to verse 12] ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

I can't wait to unpack this today, if you are looking for a message title I'm calling this:

You Can't Cross with Your Hands Full.

When I was a maybe 6 years old my parents and grandparents took me to see the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in Jacksonville. How many of you got to see them when you were a kid? Best I can remember, we actually got to see them unload the circus train too which was an added bonus for me. But one of the main attractions at any circus are the trapeze artists, right? I mean the elephants are cool. The clowns are creepy. But the trapeze guys are way up at the top of the big top, back in the day without a net, and what makes your stomach drop every single time is that to catch the next bar, they have to do what to the one they are holding onto? Let go, right? And there's this moment where they are literally flying through the air holding onto absolutely nothing with no guarantee the other trapeze artist did their part to get the bar back in time. Makes me nervous just thinking about it.

BUT that's the whole act, right? You cannot catch the next bar until you release the one that got you this far. AND that's all I've got, let's pray... I'm kidding. Sort of.

Because here's what we do. We stand at the edge of a new season with the old season white-knuckled in both hands, and then we wonder why we can't grab hold of what God's got in front of us. We want the new thing. We really do. But we want it while still clutching the old thing, and it doesn't work that way. Your hands only hold so much. You were not designed to carry the last chapter and the next one at the same time.

And come on, sometimes the thing you're clutching is a bad or harmful thing, and letting go feels like freedom. Amen? That one's easy to preach. An abusive relationship. An addiction. Unforgiveness. BUT most of the time, most of the time the thing in your hands is good. It was a genuinely good season. A good job. A good city or neighborhood. A season of raising little kids that you would give anything to have back for one more Friday afternoon. Nobody wants to let go of something good. That feels less like freedom and more like betrayal.

BUT why? What is underneath all the clutching for the old when we have the chance for something new? That is a complex question obviously, BUT a huge reason is fear. The fear is that if you open your hands to something new then you're admitting the thing you loved is really, truly over. That letting go is the same as saying it didn't matter, or you didn't love them enough, or you're fine with losing it—and you are not fine with it! SO, you hold on, because holding on at least feels like loyalty.

But church we all need to hear this, preaching to myself here, *clutching onto a season that's already ended isn't loyalty. It's just a slow, sad way to miss the next one.*

So, let's just name it. Every new beginning is standing on top of an ending. You cannot start something without stopping something. Every threshold you cross has a small death buried underneath it, AND some of them aren't small at all. The last day at the job you loved and that faithfully provided for your family. The empty bedroom that still smells a little like them. The title that no one will call you anymore. The friendship that was so strong, but you know distance will change it. You cannot start something new without stopping something old.

SO, this is the week we need to talk about the goodbyes, because the ending is the part everybody wants to skip, BUT it's the part God will not let you skip before you take New Ground.

Watch how the whole book of Joshua opens—we saw it last week (Joshua 1):

AFTER the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aide: ² "Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them

The new land started with a funeral. The crossing and the casket are in the same sentence. SO, how do you actually let go? **FOUR THINGS** we can glean from the Apostle Paul and Jesus. If you are taking notes today, write this down:

1. Name what's in your hands.

Because you can't set down what you won't admit you're holding.

SO, what was the Apostle Paul holding in our text from Philippians? Well, before Paul talks about letting go, he makes a list, back up to verse 4. Paul lays out his entire résumé:

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

This is what made Paul, Paul. This was his pedigree, a Jew of Jews, it was his upbringing, his education, his religious heritage, his reputation, all the stuff in his life that he accomplished through sheer willpower and determination. He was born into the right

family, in the right country, had the right education, lived the right kind of life, this is the guy every Jew wanted to be.

But now look again at verse 7:

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now **CONSIDER** loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸
What is more, I **CONSIDER** everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.

In verses 7 and 8, Paul uses the language of an ancient financial ledger. By setting “gains” against “loss,” he uses commercial terms drawn directly from the business world. Meaning that when Paul says he “considers” these gains a loss, he is making a deliberate value judgment. He took everything that used to sit in his profit column—his heritage, his status, his security, his whole hard-earned identity as a Jew of Jews—and he made the deliberate call to move it, line by line, into the loss column. WHY? Because he'd found something worth infinitely more!

This is what that means for you and I today. Letting go, for Paul, was not an emotion. It was a decision. He didn't wait until he “felt” ready to release his old life. He sat down and did the accounting.

And I think that's actually a relief. Because if letting go is a feeling, then you're stuck waiting on a feeling that may never show up! You could spend your whole life waiting to “feel” ready to release something and go to your grave still holding it. But if letting go is a decision, you can make it today. Before the feeling ever arrives. You can move something into the loss column while your heart is still standing there arguing with you about it.

SO, the first thing God's asking you to do this week is to make a list and actually name it. What's in your hands right now that God is asking you to hold a little looser? Is it a role you loved? A version of your life you keep trying to get back? A dream you had for how this was all supposed to go? And be specific because vague grief stays vague. “I just feel kind of off since everything changed” is not a list. The list is:

- I miss my old kitchen and the way the light came in the window in the morning.
- I miss being the guy that fixed everything for everybody at work.
- I miss who I was when the kids were little and needed me for everything.
- I miss the prestige of that title or position.

Name the actual thing. Because a vague fog you can't fight, but a list is something you can hand to God one item at a time.

Because here's what happens when we don't. And I have learned so much about this from John Eldedge and others through the years. But when we don't name it and grieve it we just haul it around everywhere we go unopened. You ever move into a new house and there's that one box marked "misc" in Sharpie that you never actually unpack? And it just migrates from garage to garage, house to house, for a decade, and you don't even remember what's in it anymore. You just keep moving it. That is exactly what an unnamed loss becomes. You drag it into the new marriage, the new job, the new city, a sealed box of grief you never opened, taking up space, quietly weighing down every single move, and you cannot figure out why the new place never quite feels like home. Open the box! You can't hand God something you refuse to even look at.

So, put a name on it. Which brings us to the second thing, and this one we are terrible at:

2. Call it what it is, a loss.

Write it down. Call it what it is. A loss.

Look at the words Paul is willing to use. Verse 8:

I consider everything a loss...

Not exactly the most inspirational of Paul's is it? "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" we like that one, out of context. But here Paul says, everything was a loss. He doesn't say he traded it. He doesn't say they were a down payment. He uses the language of loss, because that's what it was. Paul is grieving here even as he's pressing forward to something he values more—knowing Christ. This was his whole world, his whole identity, all lost.

And I think this is where a lot of us get stuck, because somewhere along the way we picked up this idea that grieving something means we lack faith. That if we were really trusting God, we'd just smile and move on and post the verse on the Gram and be fine. So, we skip the grief. We rush past it. We "stay positive" and then we can't figure out why, three years into the new season, we're still not really "in". We're still standing there with our hands full, exhausted, because we never actually put anything down. We just got really good at pretending it wasn't heavy.

Here's the truth, and I want you to write this one down:

Grief is not the enemy of moving forward but refusing to grieve is.

Because when somebody dies, we know what to do. There's a casket, there's a service, people bring food, everybody knows how to show up. But so much of what we lose in a

transition never gets a funeral. Nobody brings a casserole when your last kid moves out. There's no service for the best friend who's still alive but gone from your life. It's all real loss but with no funeral. And hear me, **grief you don't name doesn't go away—it just goes underground, and it runs your life from down there.** Amen?

And you've seen exactly what that looks like, even if you never had a name for it. It's the person who's short with everybody for two years after a loss and swears up and down they're fine. It's the guy who threw himself into work so hard he never had to sit still long enough to feel anything. It's the smile that comes a half-second too fast when you ask how they are doing.

Grief you won't carry out through the front door will always find a way in through the back door! Through your temper, through your body, through the numbness that quietly settles over everything, so you don't have to feel the one thing you're avoiding. The bill comes due either way. You either grieve on purpose, up front, or you pay for it inadvertently for years.

C.S. Lewis knew this. For most of his life he was single. At age 57 he finally met the love of his life. But after only 3 years of marriage, his wife Joy died of cancer. After Joy's death he wrote a little book called "Grief Observed" under the pseudonym N.W. Clerk to protect his privacy, but the very first line is this:

"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear."

C.S. Lewis was one of the most brilliant men of faith of the 20th century and grief still ambushed him and felt like fear. If it ambushed him, it's going to ambush you. AND that's not weakness or a lack of faith! Lewis argues that grief isn't an interruption of love; it's a phase of it. He says bereavement follows love as naturally as autumn follows summer; it's part of the same thing, not its enemy.

Remember, what we said, grief is not the enemy of moving forward, but refusing to grieve is. Making peace with your past does not mean deciding your past was trash. It means being grateful for what it was, honest about it being over, and willing to rank it beneath what God's doing now. Gratitude and grief can hold hands. Amen?

I've watched people do this, I've stood with people at the end of a good chapter that absolutely broke their hearts to leave AND instead of pretending it was fine, and instead of pretending it was all bad, they did the hard and holy thing. They said, "I loved this. It hurts that it is over. But God, I trust You anyway." That's not a contradiction, church, that's honest prayer! Half the Psalms are somebody weeping and worshiping at the exact same time! God can hold your gratitude and your grief in the very same hand! He is not asking you to pick one.

So, grieve it. On purpose. Write it in a journal, mark the ending somehow, have the funeral nobody else is going to throw for you.

And once you've grieved it, then you have to release it. Which is the third thing. And I want to show you how, because we've got the best possible example. I mean we can see this from Paul, but write this down:

3. Say goodbye the way Jesus did.

Well, how did Jesus say goodbye? If you have your Bible or Bible app, hang a left from Philippians and find John chapter 14. The night before He died, He's in an upper room with the men He'd done life with for three years, and He knows He's leaving them. And He doesn't deny it, and He doesn't dramatize it. He just does it well! John chapter 14. Watch the anatomy of a holy goodbye. First thing He says, verse 1:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

Jesus tends to the ones He's leaving, He thinks about them before Himself. Then He's honest about the departure, He says:

² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I AM GOING there to prepare a place for you?

He doesn't pretend He's staying. He names it. Third, He tells them it's FOR something, “I am going there to prepare a place for you.” The leaving had a purpose; it wasn't random, it wasn't punishment. And then the last piece, verse 3:

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

He anchors the whole goodbye in a promise of reunion.

See, in a Jewish betrothal back then, once a couple was pledged to each other, the groom would go away—back to his father's house—to build on an addition, or to prepare a place for his bride. And he'd be gone a while. AND she didn't get a date on the calendar; she just had to stay ready. And then one day he'd come back to bring her to the place he'd built, and the wedding would begin.

So, when Jesus stands in that upper room and says, “I am going to prepare a place for you... and I will come back and take you to be with me” every person in that room hears wedding language. He's not just leaving. He's the Groom, going to build the house, coming back for His bride. He turned the worst goodbye in history into a betrothal.

That's how you say goodbye in faith instead of in denial. You tend to the people. You tell the truth about what's ending. You trust that God's up to something in it. And you hold onto the promise that in Christ, no goodbye is ever the last word.

Now compare that to how most of us actually handle a goodbye. Some of us just ghost the whole ending, we slip out the side door of a season, never say anything, never process a thing, and we call that being strong. Some of us do the opposite and cling so hard we make the leaving miserable for everybody, guilt-tripping our way through the last chapter. And some of us just flat-out pretend it isn't happening, right up until the second it does, and then it flattens us.

BUT Jesus... He looked the ending dead in the eye. He named it. He blessed the people He was leaving. And He walked toward the hard thing on purpose, because He could already see what was waiting on the other side of it. That's not denial and it's not clinging. That's faith with its eyes wide open! Amen?

So, say your goodbye. Say it well, say it in faith, tend to the people, tell the truth. And then keep going! Which is the last thing, and this is where I want us to land:

4. Turn your body toward the field.

Write it down. Turn your body toward the field... Here is what I mean, back to Philippians 3, verse 13. Paul says:

¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: **FORGETTING** what is behind and **STRAINING** toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

That word "straining" is an athletic competition word. Picture a runner at full sprint, the whole body leaned out over the finish line, every muscle pulled forward, reaching with everything in them. Because nobody runs a race looking over their shoulder, right? You'd lose; you'd run into the wall. So, Paul says when he went into the New Ground of life in Christ his whole being leaned forward.

And he says "forgetting," not like amnesia. He remembers his story; he just told it to us in verse 4. Biblical forgetting means you stop letting the past have a vote in your future! You quit going back to relitigate it! You stop letting it set the ceiling on what God's allowed to do next!

There's an old story people tell about how they used to trap monkeys in some parts of the world. The way the story goes, you take a jar that is too heavy for a monkey to carry with a narrow neck, and you drop something the monkey wants down inside it. The monkey reaches in and grabs a fistful. But now his fist is bigger than the opening, and he can't get his hand out. The monkey is completely free; nothing is holding him except his own refusal to open his hand and let go of the thing he grabbed. He'd rather stay stuck than drop it.

AND because I would never call you a monkey, I've been that monkey. I have stood in the exact spot where God is trying to lead me somewhere good, stuck, not because anything's holding me, but because I will not open my hands.

SO, let's think of opening our hands like this. Frederick Buechner (A famous Presbyterian preacher and theologian) had this idea that you never really leave your past behind you the way you'd leave a town in the rearview mirror. You carry it inside you. The point was never to get rid of your past. The point is to make peace with it so it can ride along instead of holding you hostage. He said:

“It is important to tell at least from time to time the secret of who we truly and fully are—even if we tell it only to ourselves—because otherwise we run the risk of losing track of who we truly and fully are... It is through memory that we are able to reclaim much of our lives that we have long since written off by finding that in everything that has happened to us over the years God was offering us possibilities of new life and healing.”

So, this morning, some of you have been standing at the water's edge of New Ground for a lot longer than you'd admit. You named the water in week one. You can even see the ark. But you have not moved, and now you know why. It's your hands, they're full, they're full of a season that was good, and you're scared that letting go means it didn't matter.

Letting go doesn't mean it didn't matter. Letting go means you believe the God who gave you that good thing has another good thing on the far side of the river, and He cannot put it in a closed fist.

SO, open your hands. Like actually do it, open your hands right where you're sitting. That's the posture. Empty hands aren't a tragedy; empty hands are how you get ready to receive.

Because here's what I've come to believe about our God. Every single time He asks you to open your hand and let something go, He is not trying to take something from you. He's trying to make room to put something into you. He is not a thief. He's a Father.

And a good Father doesn't pry a good thing out of a child's fingers just to leave them standing there empty and crying. He does it because both His hands are full of the next thing, and you can't receive it with your fists still clenched around the last thing.

SO, open your hands, church! Open your hands! The God who parted a flooding river at harvest is not going to march you all the way to the water just to leave you stranded on the bank with nothing! But He needs your hands free! He's got something to put in them! Amen!

Let me bring it home. Here's a hard question, and I'll sit in it with you:

What's the good thing from your last season that you've quietly turned into an idol by refusing to release it?

Because a good gift held too tight stops being a gift and starts being an anchor.

I've watched it happen to parents, to leaders, to couples, to churches... The gift was real and the season was blessed. In fact, because it was so good that is why they clinched it so tightly. But the grip is the thing that turned it into a cage. God is not asking you to love it less. He's asking you to hold it with an open palm, the way you were always meant to.

What's the good thing from your last season that you've quietly turned into an idol by refusing to release it? What would it look like this week to actually grieve it, thank God for it, and open your hand?

Because you can't grab the next bar with a fist full of the last one.

[PRAYER TIME]