

GOING DEEPER STUDY NOTES (July 30, 2023)

FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY

Why are my expectations so high? When I go out to a nice restaurant, I expect everything to be “perfect”: the meal cooked just right, the presentation of the food beautiful, the service without defect. If the food is cold, if the plate doesn’t look great, if the service isn’t stellar, I can be critical. I may not send the food back, or voice my discontent to the manager, but I’m making mental notes on whether I’ll return. Conversations with those I’ve shared the experience with often focus on deficiencies, or on how close to “perfect” my, our, experience was. I have the same expectation when I stay overnight in a hotel, when I select vegetables at the store, when I shop at the hardware store. I’m looking for “perfection.” Where did I, and I know I share this with many others, get this expectation?

Sadly, sometimes this leaks into my relationships: my relationship with others, with myself. I acknowledge intellectually that no one (God is the exception) is “perfect”, that I’m not perfect, but there is something in me that wants perfection. I want to be a perfect father, a perfect friend. And, when my friends aren’t perfect, even in small ways, my unreal expectations wrestle with what I know of reality.

I’m hard on myself. I want to be perfect, or close to it. Not physically, my defects are reflected to me daily. But morally, spiritually, character-wise, work-wise, the expectation persists. If I come up short in my relationship with God, I feel I’ve failed. This is foolish but my struggle remains. Why do I expect I will live out my faith in Jesus perfectly? What room does that expectation leave for a healthy understanding of human sin and weakness, and God’s undeserved love and grace. There is a destructive temptation to expect an all-in, all the time, unwavering, sold-out, devotion to Jesus.

Instead, I find freedom in the words, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect.” Knowing I am on a journey, along with everyone else, that we are all a work of God in progress, unleashes God’s grace in my life ... grace for myself, and grace for others. For restaurants too. From the imperfect person, Christian, pastor, Curt.

Perfect (Philippians 3:12-21)

^{3:12} Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature

think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What does this passage say about perfection?
2. How does Paul view his own perfection?
3. What does this passage say to those who want to “give up”?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. What does it mean, “Christ Jesus has made me His own”?
5. What does it mean “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead”? For Christians, what lies ahead?
6. Does pressing on “toward the goal” mean that our faith in Jesus is about us, about the effort we put in, our hard work?
7. Why would Paul encourage the Philippians, and us, to imitate him? Isn’t that rather arrogant? What does he mean?

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU?

8. What standards were you taught growing up?
9. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 of course being “perfect”, rate yourself, your character, how good you are as a friend, an employee/employer, a parent, a Christian?
10. How do you work through being less than “perfect”?
11. How hard should you work at being a Christian? See 2:12-13
12. Who in your Christian life (spiritual life) do you imitate? Why?

As you spend time praying remember that prayer is meant to be the most natural part of your day. Prayer is a conversation: talking to God and listening to God. Ask God to help you honestly face your imperfection. Ask God to help you look to Him, depend on Him, press on to Him. He will help you because He loves you.

Bible Study Suggestions (some free copies at the Welcome Center)

1. “Philippians for Everyone”. N.T. Wright
2. “Life Lessons from Philippians: Guide to Joy.” Max Lucado