

Big Idea: Nothing is more important than knowing Jesus.

Primary Scripture: Philippians 3:4-11

Supporting Scripture: Matthew 16:26; Luke 9:23-25

CAPTURE (Why should students pay attention to and care about your message?)

- You open your phone. It's a Sunday afternoon and you've got nothing going on. You're not even looking for anything specific. You're just scrolling.
- And within about thirty seconds, there it is.
 - Someone from your school is at a concert you didn't know about.
 - A group of people you sort of know on a beach somewhere laughing, looking like they're having the best weekend of their lives. A couple that seems genuinely happy.
 - And then that one person your age who somehow has everything figured out... the aesthetic, the followers, the highlight reel.
 - And you're lying on your couch in the same clothes you've been wearing since yesterday.
- You close the app... but then you open it again.
 - Because something in you is hoping the next scroll is going to feel different than the last one. It doesn't. But you keep going anyway.
- Here's what's really happening in that moment.
 - You're not just bored. You're comparing.
 - And comparison is just another word for chasing.
 - Chasing the life that looks better, the experience that feels more meaningful, the version of yourself that has it more together than the one currently lying on the couch.
 - And this doesn't just happen when you're scrolling on your phone.
- Think about how much mental energy you spend in a given week *chasing* things.
 - We spend enormous amounts of energy pursuing things we're convinced will finally make us feel satisfied.

- It's exhausting. And most of us have never stopped to ask why it keeps happening.
- What if the problem isn't that we're chasing the wrong version of the right thing? What if we're chasing the wrong things entirely?
 - That's the question the Apostle Paul raises in Philippians 3.
- Paul had been there. He'd tried every option. Education, status, the right family name, a perfect religious track record, the kind of credentials that made people stop and take notice when he walked into a room.
 - And what he said about all of it might be the most surprising thing in this entire letter.
- We're in week three of **Get Real**.
- Over the last two weeks, we've been watching Paul navigate impossible circumstances with a kind of joy and purpose that doesn't make sense on the surface.
 - Last week, we saw how he responded to the selfishness in the church with humility.
 - The week before we saw him find purpose in the middle of a prison cell.
 - And now, in Philippians 3, he goes even deeper. He tells us exactly what's been driving him all along.

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- Paul wasn't shy about laying out his credentials.

⁴ though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! ⁵ I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. ⁶ I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.
(Philippians 3:4-6 – NLT)

- In first-century Jewish culture, the things Paul is listing here were the ultimate credentials.
- Pharisees were some of the most respected, most educated, most disciplined religious leaders in the entire Jewish world.

- Think of them as the people who had achieved everything the culture told them to chase. Top of the class. Perfect record. Respected by everyone who mattered.
- Paul wasn't just *in* that group. He was *exceptional*... even by their standards.
 - He was so devoted to his beliefs that he was willing to do whatever it took to protect them, including hunting down people who threatened them.
- By any standard, Paul had made it.

⁷ I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. ⁸ Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ. (Philippians 3:7-8 – NLT)

- In the culture he was writing to, his credentials were the kind of thing people spent their entire lives working toward and never reached.
 - The best of the best. And he's saying next to knowing Jesus... they're *trash*. Things you throw out and don't look back at.
- In the second part of the passage, Paul doesn't say he wants to know facts about Jesus or follow Jesus' teachings.
 - He says he wants to *know* Jesus.
- In Paul's world, that word carries the weight of a ***genuine personal relationship***.
 - The kind where someone actually knows what's going on in your life. The kind that changes you from the inside out.
- Paul traded the most impressive resume in the room for a relationship. And he says it was the best trade he ever made.

¹⁰ I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, ¹¹ so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! (Philippians 3:10-11 – NLT)

- Paul knows that a genuine relationship with Jesus isn't about being comfortable.
- He wants to know Christ so deeply that he's willing to share in His suffering. He wants the kind of closeness that costs something.

- Remember, he's telling us this from a prison cell, so it really means something when he says it's the best decision he's ever made.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. We're all chasing something.

- Everything on Paul's list represents something he was chasing.
 - Status... Reputation... Credentials... The approval of people who mattered... The feeling that he had earned his place... Things that he thought really mattered.
- We are all chasing *something*. And most of the time we don't even realize we're doing it.
 - It just feels like *wanting things*. It feels like *ambition* or *motivation* or just trying to have a *good life*.
- But underneath a lot of it is the same desire Paul had... a relentless pursuit of something that will finally make us feel like we're enough.
- And it wasn't just Paul. Jesus talked about this, too.

¹⁶ “And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?” (Matthew 16:26 – NLT)

- Jesus isn't necessarily saying ambition is wrong... He's just asking us to consider what we're trading our lives for... and whether or not it's worth the cost.
- Paul's answer, after a lifetime of chasing the wrong things, was no... it's not worth it.

2. Paul traded up.

- Paul had credentials that most people spent their entire lives trying to earn. And he willingly walked away from all of it.
- Paul had found something that made everything else look small by comparison.

²³ Then he said to the crowd, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. ²⁵ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed? (Luke 9:23-25 – NLT)

- The goal is to evaluate what we're really chasing, because most of the things we pursue aren't necessarily bad in themselves.
- Paul and Jesus are both asking the same questions... can those things deliver what you truly need? Are you chasing these things to achieve purpose and worth? Will they actually deliver these things?
- Paul would say Jesus is the only one who can deliver on those promises. And I couldn't agree more.

3. Knowing Jesus isn't the same as knowing *about* Jesus.

- Paul doesn't just say he wants to better understand Christ. He says he wants to *know* Jesus. And there's a big difference.
- There's knowing facts about someone and then there's knowing them for real.
- Paul wants to walk through life alongside Jesus closely enough that even suffering feels worth it because of who he's going through it with.
- It's the kind of closeness that reshapes how you think, what you want, and what you're willing to give up.
- He already knows everything about you and He's not going anywhere. That's not something you can find anywhere else.
- That's available to you... **right now**.
 - You don't have to wait until you're older or more spiritual or have more of your life figured out.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Make a "what I'm chasing list."

- This week, write down three things you spend the most time, energy, or mental space on.
- Not what you think you *should* be chasing. What you're *really* chasing. The thing you check on constantly. The thing that takes up the most space in your head when nothing else is demanding your attention.
- Then ask yourself one honest question about each one. Will this still matter in 10 years?
 - Think about what 10 years really looks like for you.

- From that vantage point, look back at what's consuming you right now. Some of it will still matter. A lot of it probably won't.
- Don't just make the list and move on.
 - Bring it to God. Pray through each thing and ask Him to show you what's worth chasing and what's quietly costing you more than it's giving you.
- This isn't a guilt exercise. It's an invitation to let God reorient your priorities.

2. Make time for Jesus.

- This week, carve out ten minutes to talk to Jesus the way you'd talk to someone you're close to.
- Not a quick prayer before you fall asleep. A real conversation.
- Tell Him what's on your mind. What you're worried about. What you're excited about. What you're confused about.
- And then... stop talking for a minute... and just be quiet.
- The challenge here isn't just to pray more. It's to be more honest and more present in the time you already have.
- Less performance, more conversation. The goal is closeness, not just consistency.
- If this is newer territory for you, start simple. You don't need the right words. Just show up and talk. God can handle the mess.

3. Give up one thing you're holding too tightly.

- Think about something you're clinging to right now.
 - Maybe it's your reputation and the way certain people see you.
 - Maybe it's a relationship you're terrified of losing.
 - Maybe it's control over a situation that was never yours to control.
 - Maybe it's an achievement or an image that feels like it defines you.
- Write it down. And then pray a prayer like this: "God, I want to hold this more loosely. You matter more than this."
- Every time this week you feel the urge to grab it back, pray that prayer again.

- You don't have to have it all figured out before you pray. Just be honest with God about what it is and ask Him to make Jesus feel more real to you than the thing you're clinging to.