

## WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?

### Focus

### Philippians 3:12-21

Last week, Pastor Bryan asked you a very important question: What is your greatest treasure? He wanted you to think about your highest priorities and your most prized possessions. He asked you what you have that is worth living for and worth dying for. Those are pretty great questions, and they deserve an answer. I want to continue that vein of thought today by drilling down into your spiritual life to see how deep it goes and how precious your faith REALLY is to you. I want you to consider how well you are running the RACE of FAITH. The truth is, some of you desperately need to hear this message today. You are discouraged because of the slow pace of your spiritual growth. You have decided that the deeper spiritual life is reserved only for pastors and monks and missionaries. You have concluded that only those who spend hours each day in prayer and meditation (rather than spending all day at work with cranky co-workers) can ever have a meaningful, impactful relationship with Christ. You are just glad that God was willing to save you, and you figure that you will just make it to heaven by "the skin of your teeth!" My prayer is that you will discover something new today!

A joyful and meaningful spiritual life is not reserved for only full-time professionals and social hermits. Moreover, "common" Christians are not called to wait until they get to heaven to know Christ intimately and become more like him in their character and conduct. It is to be our daily aim in life. Like Paul, we are to strain to know Christ better and to allow his power to flow through our lives. **So, how do we come to experience Christ as our greatest treasure?** I am glad you asked.

**Knowing Christ and experiencing his resurrection power is accomplished by choosing to maintain the proper focus in our walk.**

This is a fundamental concept that Paul pounds throughout the book of Philippians. It is the KEY to a healthy spiritual life, and we will see it clearly throughout the final half of this little letter. You see, one of the great TRAGEDIES of life would be to spend your whole life focused on accomplishing the WRONG thing! (Like the guy who spent years climbing the ladder of success only to find it was leaning against the wrong wall!) Let me ask you: What are you focusing on every day in your life, and what are you striving for every day of your life? Is Christ central to your thoughts and ambitions, or do you have divided loyalties that are competing against one another for supremacy in your life? Where is your ladder leaning?

The Apostle Paul paints a clear picture for us of what it means to make Christ your greatest treasure and spiritual vitality your greatest goal in life. If you WANT to learn from him about how to experience these things, then you WILL! But if you don't really want it, then you have an uphill climb on your hands! Have you ever tried to make someone do something that they DID NOT want to do? It is often a comical, maddening effort. I remember trying to get my children to go to bed when

they were toddlers. They cried. They lay limp on the floor. They grabbed furniture and door trim and the dog's tail in order to stop me from succeeding in getting them to their room. God must feel this way sometimes when he is working to make us become more like Christ! He is the one exerting all of the effort! Paul, on the other hand, makes it clear that he is in absolute agreement with God's goals for his life. He wants to take God's goals for him and make them his own. God is not FORCING him to desire and strive for the things that God has prepared for him; Paul is joyfully embracing what God has purposed for him! Here is how the Amplified Bible translates our first verse: **Philippians 3:12 AMP**

**12 Not that I have now attained [this ideal], or have already been made perfect, but I press on to lay hold of (grasp) and make my own, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me and made me His own.**

I will never forget the moment when one of my greatest spiritual mentors told me how he struggled against sin in his own life. He admitted to me that his journey was a difficult battle, and that he often fell short of where he wanted to be. He told me that he really battled with his own insecurities and that he had to ask God daily to protect him from his battle with lust and pride. And this man was a spiritual GIANT to me! How do you think his admissions affected me? Do you think that they made me lose respect for him? Do you think that his honesty caused me to doubt the power of God or feel that true godliness was just a farce? Let me answer my own question: NOT ONE BIT! His honesty actually validated my struggles and gave me great encouragement! I knew this man, and his walk with God was genuine and deep. He struggled with self and sin just like I did, and yet he was deeply committed to walking in purity and holiness, and he was impacting the world for Christ. His honesty did not make the Christian life seem more elusive than ever; it made it more REAL and ATTAINABLE than ever. It helped me to understand that the power of Christ is available for ALL of his redeemed ones, even when they have feet of clay. I needed that honest conversation.

Paul did this same beautiful thing for the believers in Philippi in his letter to the church. He busted himself out! He admitted that he had not yet ARRIVED, but that he was passionately pursuing the goal of an ever-increasing spiritual maturity. Even Paul still had room to grow! They desperately needed to hear his words. This did not give the Philippians permission to FAIL; it gave them incentive to FORGE AHEAD! However, some of you have a real PROBLEM in your spiritual life because you are not applying what Paul says to us in this passage. **Philippians 3:13-14 NLT**

**13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.**

This is a beautiful verse about single-minded, faith-driven purpose in life! There is wise simplicity and deep determination in his words. But these words also contain a STRONG WARNING to each of us. You see, some of you are in DANGER because you are maintaining a very unhealthy focus on the past.

**If you want to move forward in your faith you must remember to forget.**

I love the Greek word that Paul uses for forget. It is a word meaning, “to neglect, to cease caring for.” It does not mean that you CANNOT remember some things; it means that you CHOOSE NOT to remember some things. This means that there are some things that you need to stop nurturing with your thoughts. You need to quit rehearsing them in your mind. Some of you are obsessed with failures and sins that you committed ages ago (or last week!), and you are absolutely STUCK in your spiritual life because of this. Enough! It is time to choose to lay aside those memories, and set your face forward to what lies ahead in your walk with Christ. **You see, the KEY to forgetting is FOCUS. When you focus on your past, you are most likely to REPEAT it. This is because we always move toward what we are focused upon.** Recently, I heard a story about one of our dear CHC members that was run over by a car as she was walking beside a road years ago. An unlicensed teenaged girl was driving the car. The girl hit my friend because she kept looking at her instead of at the road as she drove by. It nearly cost my friend her life.

Some of you feel that it is impossible for you to have a dynamic relationship with Christ because you are being DRAGGED into DESPAIR by your past sins and failures. You failed in your moral or relational life at some point. You denied Christ (like Peter), or you fell into immorality (like King David). Paul was responsible for the death of godly people like Stephen and for separating Christian families and putting innocent people in jail for their faith in Christ. He had to let those things be dissolved in the ocean of God’s forgiveness, or he would be immobilized by his horror over them. Paul chose to stop nurturing his past failures and instead focused on the limitless resources he had in Christ. Please understand; I am not saying that you are just to IGNORE it when you sin. **“Forgetting” does not mean failing to deal with your failures. Confession, restitution, and reconciliation are all a part of growing in your spiritual life. But once you have exposed and renounced your sins, leave them in your past!** Let God’s forgiveness be a FUNERAL for your former failures. Bury them and do not go and visit the gravesite! God doesn’t, so why should we? Instead of obsessing over your sins and failures, I want you to begin CELEBRATING God’s forgiveness for those sins. When they come to mind, choose to thank God OUT LOUD (if need be!) for making you whole and free by his blood. Remind yourself that you are forgiven, loved, and chosen by God.

On the other hand, some of you are practicing an UNHEALTHY form of forgetfulness. You are being tempted to GO BACK to what you once were and to the things that you used to do; all the while forgetting what those sins COST you while they enslaved you. Wake up! If you are going to remember something, remember it fully. Don’t abuse the gift of forgetfulness. **After Paul teaches the Philippians about the**

importance of focus and forgetfulness, he instructs them about MOVING FORWARD in their faith. He wants them to see all of the benefits that come with spiritual diligence. We do not have time to go over all that Paul is referring to when he talks about the PRIZE of the high calling of God in Christ. Let me just whet your appetite. First, a great prize of spiritual diligence is the joy and satisfaction that comes with knowing that you have pleased the heart of God by finishing well. How many of you are driven by the thought of hearing those wonderful words from Christ: “Well done, my good and faithful servant!” Not only that, there are many different crowns that we can receive through our faithfulness that will honor God throughout eternity. [The Crown of Life, The Crown of Righteousness, The Soul-Winners crown, etc.] Study up on those for yourself! Finally, Paul just exhorts us to make sure that we HOLD ON to the progress that we have made up to this point. Don’t slide backwards! Note that he does not ARGUE his point. He trusts God to make the truth plain to any who might disagree. **Philippians 3:15-16 NLT**

**15 Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. 16 But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.**

In the last verses of chapter 3, Paul hones in on another very dangerous mentality that has many in its grip. While some of us have a very UNHEALTHY focus in our lives, there are others that have developed an absolutely UNGODLY focus in life. We see this tragic picture in **Philippians 3:17-19 NLT**

**17 Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. 18 For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth.**

We must remember that Paul is not talking about people outside of the church here. He is talking about church members who may even have a sound theology and doctrinal belief system. People who think this way are exposed not because they BELIEVE the wrong things about Christ (Doctrine), but because they BEHAVE in a manner that CONTRADICTS the CROSS of Christ! **JAMES 4:4 NLT**

**4 You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with the world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again: If you want to be a friend of the world, you make yourself an enemy of God.**

You see, faith is all about a heavenly, God-ward focus. Ungodly people only think about life on this earth. Their focus is solely on their own desires and needs. Paul says that they are SENSUAL and CARNAL. These people are obsessed with a fleshly focus. Their god is their belly. Their sole aim is their own pleasure. Jesus gave the

clearest picture of a person like this when he talked about a rich man who had so much that he decided to build bigger barns to set himself up for the rest of his life. Little did he know how SHORT that life would be! **Luke 12:19-21 NLT**

19 And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!" 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?' 21 "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

That is an ungodly focus. Can you see it? Their god is their appetite; they glory in shameful things, and they only THINK ABOUT life on this earth. This is once again about perspective. Their MINDSET is an earth-bound worldview. I think that it is important to note that Paul says that these people are enemies of the CROSS of Christ. Those are strategic words. The word for **enemies** is a word meaning "hostile toward, hateful, opposing [something]." What is it that they hate and oppose? It is the Cross of Christ. First, this means that they oppose the idea of sins destructive power and its defeat at the cross by the substitutionary death of Christ. These people see no real practical, personal need for a new heart and a new love for holiness and purity. They only want an eternal life insurance policy, not a life transformation. They are enemies of the very purpose and power of the cross. They glory in their shame, but a true believer glories in the cross. These people also refute the reality of a life of obedience to God and the necessity of self-denial. Remember, Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow me!" These are not words for the faint of heart. A life without self-denial is opposed to the very spirit of the Cross of Christ. **I ask you: Are you a STRANGER to self-denial? Do you know what it means to say NO to yourself and YES to God on a regular basis? If not, then you are living a lie. You need to stop FEELING your way along, and start "FAITHING" your way along!** It is time to repent of your Godless mindset. If not, you are simply headed for a certain end.

Paul said that the end for these people is destruction because EARTH, not HEAVEN, is their desired destination. This is why Paul reminds us of our true citizenship.

**Philippians 3:20-21 NLT**

20 But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. 21 He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

I wonder; are you running the RAT RACE, or the RIGHT RACE? Your focus will give you your answer.

Let's pray.