

Small Group Guide

Philippians 3 | Pressing On in Christ

Overview

This week's sermon from Philippians 3 covered three major themes: the danger of adding anything to faith in Christ alone for salvation, the importance of pressing forward rather than living in the past, and the value of godly examples in the Christian life.

Pastor Jerry walked us through Paul's urgent warnings against legalism, his personal testimony of counting all things as loss for Christ, and his athletic imagery of pressing toward the goal of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Key Takeaways

1. Rejoicing in the Lord is a discipline, not a feeling. Paul commands the Philippians to rejoice, and he does so repeatedly. This is not a passive emotion but an active, ongoing choice that goes against our natural tendency to focus on our circumstances. Our "up-look" determines our outlook.

2. Salvation is by faith in Christ alone. Paul's warning against the Judaizers is just as relevant today. Anything that adds a requirement to faith in Christ for salvation or standing before God diminishes the finished work of the cross. Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 3:28 make clear that justification comes through faith, not works.

3. Our past should refine us, not define us. Paul counted his impressive religious resume as rubbish compared to knowing Christ. He pressed forward, not backward. God wants to use who we are right now, not who we used to be.

4. Spiritual maturity is a lifelong process. Even at the end of his ministry, Paul said he had not yet attained perfection. Sanctification is ongoing. We are never spiritually finished this side of eternity.

5. We are called to be examples and to follow godly examples. Just as Paul pointed to Jesus, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and himself as patterns of faith, we are both recipients and providers of living examples in the body of Christ.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question (Ice Breaker) Think of someone in your life, inside or outside of the church, who has been a living example of faith for you. What was it about the way they lived that made an impact?

Section 1: Rejoicing in the Lord (Philippians 3:1)

1. Pastor Jerry noted that rejoicing in the Lord takes effort because it is not our natural response to difficulty. What tends to pull your attention away from rejoicing and toward anxiety or discouragement? What has helped you redirect that focus?
2. Paul was writing from prison when he urged the Philippians to rejoice. How does knowing the circumstances Paul was in when he wrote these words change the way you receive his instruction?
3. Pastor Jerry described rejoicing as an "up-look" rather than an "outlook." What is the difference in your daily experience between those two perspectives?

Section 2: Beware of False Teaching (Philippians 3:2-3)

4. Paul used strong language to warn the Philippians about those who were teaching that faith in Christ must be supplemented with additional works or requirements. Why do you think this kind of teaching is so dangerous, and why does it seem spiritually credible on the surface?
5. Pastor Jerry said that when we add anything to faith in Christ, we are essentially saying what Jesus did is not enough. Have you ever caught yourself thinking or living as though you needed to earn or maintain God's love through your behavior? How did that affect your relationship with God?
6. There is a difference between obeying God to earn his love and obeying God because you have already received his love. How does that distinction change the way you approach your walk with Christ day to day?

Section 3: Counting All Things as Loss (Philippians 3:4-11)

7. Paul listed his credentials, his heritage, his training, his zeal, and his outward righteousness, and then called all of it rubbish compared to knowing Christ. What

are some things people today, including Christians, tend to place their confidence in rather than in Christ alone?

8. Pastor Jerry pointed out that keeping the law never saved a single person, and that Abraham was saved by faith before the law was ever given. How does understanding the purpose of the Old Testament law help clarify what it means to be justified by faith?
9. Paul expressed a deep desire to know Christ, to experience the power of his resurrection, and to share in the fellowship of his suffering. What does it look like practically to pursue that kind of experiential knowledge of God rather than just intellectual knowledge about him?

Section 4: Pressing Toward the Goal (Philippians 3:12-16)

10. Paul said plainly that he had not yet attained perfection, even after decades of ministry. How does that honesty from one of the greatest figures in the New Testament encourage or challenge you in your own walk?
11. Pastor Jerry said our past should refine us, not define us. Is there something from your past, whether a failure, a wound, or even a former identity, that you find yourself stuck in rather than pressing forward from? What would it look like to let that refine you instead?
12. Paul described pressing toward the mark as a continual, effortful pursuit. What does that kind of forward movement look like in your life right now? Are there areas where you have settled into spiritual stagnation?

Section 5: Following and Being Examples (Philippians 3:17-21)

13. Pastor Jerry noted that we can identify those who are living for Christ versus those who are living for their own benefit by asking whether people leave conversations with them feeling encouraged or discouraged. Think about your own conversations with people in the church. What kind of impact do you tend to leave?
14. Paul warned that those who are enemies of the cross often look spiritual and sound credible, but their focus is ultimately on their own benefit and position. What

guardrails help you discern healthy teaching and leadership from self-serving religion?

15. Our citizenship is in heaven, but we live here now. How does keeping an eternal perspective shape the way you engage with your work, your relationships, and your struggles this week?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice before your group meets again.

Practice Rejoicing Intentionally. Each morning this week, before you check your phone or engage with the demands of the day, spend five minutes naming specific things God has done for you. Let your first focus be upward rather than outward.

Examine Your Foundation. Honestly assess whether there are any areas of your life where you are unconsciously trying to earn or maintain God's approval through performance. Bring those areas to God in prayer and ask him to replace that striving with trust in the finished work of Christ.

Press Forward in One Specific Area. Identify one area of your spiritual life where you have been coasting or looking backward. Make one concrete decision this week to press forward, whether that means returning to consistent Bible reading, joining a ministry, having a conversation you have been avoiding, or simply asking God what he has for you next.

Be a Living Example. Think of one person in your life who is struggling in their faith or who does not yet know Christ. Commit to praying for them by name every day this week, and look for one opportunity to encourage them in a way that points to Jesus rather than to yourself.

Memorize a Key Verse. Consider committing Philippians 3:13-14 to memory this week. Reflect on what it means to forget what is behind, reach forward to what is ahead, and press toward the goal of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.