

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
Bryan Carter  
Series: Philippians  
November 22, 2020

Joy in Knowing Jesus  
Philippians 3:1-14

**"Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence.**

**If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 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; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 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 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.**

**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. 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, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."**

**Jonathan Pokluda:** God in heaven, would you prepare our hearts for the preaching of your Word from the Scriptures? Lord, help us to know from this ancient text what we should hang on to, how we should examine our lives, how we should be conformed to the image and the character of your Son Jesus. I pray your Holy Spirit would illuminate the text and change us from within, that we would get back in our vehicles different.

Thank you for the tradition of the gathering of the church, the preaching and teaching of your Scriptures in the church, and thank you for Pastor Bryan Carter and the ways your Holy Spirit has equipped him to lead, to minister, and to preach your Word. I pray you would bless him this morning as you bless us through him this morning. In the name of Jesus, amen.

**Bryan Carter:** What a joy it is for us to gather together around God's Word. This is the highlight of all of our weeks as we gather with God's people, as we gather around the Word of God. I'm so incredibly thankful for Pastor JP inviting me and having this opportunity to share God's Word with you. I am such an admirer of JP and the amazing way God is using him, and not just in this local great church of Harris Creek but also across the country and even the world. He's an incredible voice, helping many of us learn how to connect with the next generation, but also how to do ministry well. So I thank God for him.

I want to step right into the series we've been in the last few weeks. The church has been in this book of Philippians, and it's a joy to dive right into chapter 3, to take off where we were last week in this amazing letter written by the apostle Paul. The text has already been read there in Philippians 3:1-14. I want to share today from this topic: *Joy in Knowing Jesus*.

Every single one of us has a faith story or a faith journey, when we come to Christ, that journey of not knowing him and prayerfully one day making a decision to follow him as we navigate through those steps toward spiritual maturity. My journey was growing up in a family where my mom had a passion for the Lord and a passion for the church, and my dad grew up with one but kind of drifted away.

I remember as a boy watching my dad rediscover his love for the Lord. As I watched that, I watched him then plant a church that God had put on his heart. He planted that church, and our family helped to build that church and invest in that church and reach people for Christ. But one of the tensions I often felt as I was growing up was that I often felt almost a greater allegiance to religion and the church than I did to Jesus Christ.

For whatever reason, I had this list in my mind of all of the things I'm not supposed to do. I really thought my relationship with God was built on this religious set of ideas, this legalism to some extent, that as long as I don't cuss or as long as I don't have sex, as long as I don't party, as long as I don't drink... If I don't do all of these things, then all of these things will make me earn favor with God and will establish a relationship with God.

It was this list of things, this religiosity, this religion that I struggled with for most of my life. I would go off to college at Oklahoma State University, and while there, I felt this tension and this burden. I kept trying to hold on to this list of things not to do. I wrestled through this. I would eventually end up in seminary, and there in my first semester at Dallas Seminary, they had us read a book called *The Grace Awakening* by Charles Swindoll.

As I read that book, I began to find the same tension I felt also expressed in this book as he began to unpack the distinction between this religion that has a list of things I'm supposed to do, that gives you a weight and a burden, versus the relationship, law versus grace, bondage versus freedom. He began to unpack for us there. Then when you begin to consider this idea, it's the same issue. It shows up in today's text, today's reading.

As a matter of fact, it's such a popular issue Paul talks about it in a series of his letters, this whole issue of religion versus relationship we all sometimes can struggle with. So, Paul here, in this third chapter of Philippians, begins to bring up this issue to this church he's writing to. As Paul

writes to them in chapter 1 of Philippians... As you know, Philippians is this "thank you" letter Paul writes to the church in Philippi to express his appreciation for how they have supported him in ministry.

He deals with all kinds of themes. In chapter 1, he does a prayer for them. He thanks God for them. He also tells them, "Keep your focus on the gospel of Christ no matter what goes around." Then in chapter 2, he calls them to humility and puts up the example of Jesus Christ who went to a cross so that one day he would receive the crown. He continues on to chapter 3 where he now says, "This is what it means to follow Christ. Let me help you."

Here's the first thing he says in the text. He tries to push us this direction. He says, "Listen. I have tried religion." When you consider verses 1 and 2 and then further in verses 4 and 6, Paul begins by beginning where they are. He says, "I'm re-teaching something." He says in verse 1, "It's no trouble. It's not a problem me having to teach a lesson I've taught before." Paul is helping us to understand this issue and tension of our sometimes tendency to lean toward religion or issues where we try to earn our own righteousness. It's not new.

Paul is unafraid to address the topic over and over again like he does. Then he says these words. As a matter of fact, he has talked about it in Romans and in Galatians and 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians and Colossians. It's such an important topic, because there's always this tension to make us think we can earn our righteousness rather than depending on the righteousness we gain through Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 2. Paul says, "**Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil...**" When he says, "Watch out for the dogs," I know he's not talking about the dogs you have at your home, your little pet dogs. That is not the picture I want you to catch in your mind. When he says, "Watch out for the dogs," this is almost an insult. He is insulting them. He is saying to them, "I want you to watch out for people in the church who are trying to make you think you need Jesus plus something else."

He says, "I want you to watch out for those kinds of people." He is very direct. As a matter of fact, when you read the course of the book, the flow of the book, when he gets here, his whole tone changes. He says, "Watch out for people who are trying to make you think you need something in addition to Jesus Christ and Christ alone." He calls them *dogs*. He calls them *evildoers, mutilators of the flesh*.

This was a group of people in the church. They were Jewish Christians who were attempting to say, "Not only must you follow Christ, but in addition to following Christ, you also must follow all of the Jewish laws as well. You also must adhere to circumcision and the special days and the dietary restrictions. You need both." They failed to recognize that when Jesus Christ died for our sins, he fulfilled all the law, and now through him we find access to all that we need.

Because they wanted to add on to their faith in Jesus, they were putting these burdens upon new believers and saying to them, "You need more than just Jesus Christ alone." Paul dealt with it directly. "Watch out for those kinds of people." He says, "Watch out for those who want to put

this burden upon you when that burden was already addressed at Calvary. That burden was fulfilled with Jesus Christ."

He says, "I don't want you to live your life consumed with trying not to do certain things, consumed with trying to use your own actions to justify yourself in Christ." He says, "Watch out for people who constantly do..." As a matter of fact, Paul gets very transparent. In verse 4, Paul begins to tell his own story. Paul says, "If you think you can earn your way to God..." Paul says, "Listen. I used to be the president of that fan club. I used to be the number one in line thinking that."

Paul begins to reveal his own story in verse 4. He says, "If anyone thinks they can do that, I think it even more." Verse 5: "I was circumcised on the eighth day." He says, "You're trying to get into the family. I was born into the family. I'm from the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrew of Hebrews. I was not only committed to the law, but I was a Pharisee, which means I went to the extreme in trying to honor the law. On top of that, I had so much zeal I persecuted the church. I was so committed to the law, to the old standards, I even tried to stamp out anything that supposedly opposed it." He goes on to list all of the things he does.

Here's the thing about religion and religiosity. Here's what it does. Religion always leads to three things: pride, self-righteousness, and cruelty. People who are more committed to the rules, who believe their church attendance or their giving or their memorization, who think their own actions... They're always going to end up being very prideful people. They're going to think they're better than you. They're going to think they're better than other people. They're going to think they're better than the lost who we ought to be having a love for to reach.

They will walk around with this arrogance and pridefulness that is not of God. Then there's also this self-righteousness, as though they have earned favor with God. Now don't get me wrong. There is something in each of us that wants to think what we have done, that we are contributing something, but you and I must know that is not of God. "None of us are righteous...no, not one," is what Paul would say. We stand on the righteousness of Christ.

There will also be this cruelty that often follows those who have given over to this religion and thinking that their actions and their deeds and their own ways are the pathway. Paul says, "Listen. I tried that. I tried religion. I tried it with all I had. I gave my life to it. But then I tried something else. I tried religion, but I have also tried Jesus." He gets to verse 3 and begins to unpack his experience with Jesus. Verse 3: "**For it is we who are the circumcision...**"

This whole matter of circumcision... They were trying to make them get circumcised after choosing Christ. Paul says, "We *are* the circumcision." He says, "When the circumcision was established, it was never about the physical parts. It was always about the spiritual parts. It was always about a circumcised heart. God was never about getting you to follow some list. God was always about a change in your heart, because when your heart changes, your actions always change. God wants your heart first."

Paul says, "It is about your heart." He says, "We are the circumcision because God longs and has always desired for those who would follow him to have a circumcised heart, a heart that was

turned toward God, a heart that was turned toward his Word, a heart that was dependent upon him." Religion puts on this ideal, but it's not about the external; it's about the internal. If God gets your heart, he'll get everything else.

Several years ago, my family and I... We sometimes have cleanup days at the house, and this particular day, as we were cleaning up, my oldest daughter began to use the vacuum cleaner in the house. It was making plenty of noise, as it normally did, but when she would finish vacuuming the room, when you looked back on the room you would see everything that was on the floor *before* she vacuumed was also there *after* she vacuumed.

We said, "Wait a minute. Something is going wrong. It sounds like it's working. It's making all kinds of noise, but the floor looks the same after as it did before." We said, "Let's figure out what's going on." So we took it in to have it looked at. As we took it in to have it looked at, we figured out it was malfunctioning. It was making plenty of noise, but it wasn't functioning. It wasn't doing what it was designed to do.

In many respects, that's what religion does. It makes all kinds of noise. It looks the part, but it's the same after as it was before. There's not much change. There's not much impact. There's not much difference. He says, "This is not who God has called us to be. We are the circumcision, which means we look different because our focus is not on the external; it's on what God is doing through us."

Then he gets to the next line and says: "**...we who worship by the Spirit of God...**" He reminds us that living the Christian life, following after Christ, is not a function of my own power, not a function of me just trying harder or straining. It's a function of the Spirit of God at work in your life. The beautiful thing of the Christian life is that when you decide to follow Jesus Christ, the Spirit takes up residence in your life, and when the Spirit takes up residence in your life, he then becomes president of your life to guide you and shape you and direct you.

You're no longer trying to keep up with a list of things. You are instead walking in the Spirit as the Spirit guides you and shapes you. It guides you in your prayer life. It guides you in your study of the Word. It guides you as a man, as a woman, as a parent, as a husband, as a wife. It guides you, and you are no longer relying upon your own strength. You are now relying upon the Spirit of God to guide you and direct you through his Spirit.

You move from this self-righteousness to a righteousness now that has been imputed to you through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's why he says in the next section, "**...who glory in Christ Jesus...**" He's reminding us that when you choose religion, it is all about the glory of yourself. It's all about how I look, how my friends perceive me, how my family perceives me, keeping up my reputation, keeping up how people think about me, making sure my kids look right. It's all about glory for yourself.

As a matter of fact, the more you do, the more glory you think you have, which is a vain and empty glory that he mentions in Philippians, chapter 2. But here he says, "**...who glory in Christ Jesus...**" He says, "I've tried Jesus, and I've discovered there is a glory that's found in

him that's much greater than this empty glory I sometimes try to heap on myself." He'll say it another way. He says, "You ought to rejoice in it. You ought to glory in it."

One version says, "You ought to boast in the glory that's found in Christ Jesus." We boast not in ourselves, but we boast in who Christ is. We boast in the grace of God and the goodness of God and the strength of God and the love of God and the care of God and the reliability of God. We boast in the presence of God that's with us.

He concludes with this final note in verse 3: "**...and who put no confidence in the flesh...**" When you follow after religion, you begin to believe your confidence is in what *you* can do, in what *you* can attain, but when you follow Christ, you have no confidence in your flesh. You know you are utterly dependent upon, that you can do nothing of your own strength, nothing of your own flesh. It is total dependence upon God.

You don't trust yourself. You know we are just a half inch away from breaking God's heart every single day, so you walk with a limp and not a strut, and you depend more and more on him. You say, "My confidence is in Christ and in Christ alone." He says, "I've tried religion. I've tried Jesus." Then he makes this summative statement: "I discovered there's no comparison."

He spends verses 7-11 trying to help them and help us understand that we all will be tempted toward religion, and we all will try Jesus, but he says, "When you put the two on the scales, there's a distinct difference. One will outweigh the other." He says, "I've been down the road where you are. I've seen it. I've been around it. But I want you to know I've discovered there's no comparison."

When I started pastoring our church in Dallas, I knew I would be responsible for the preaching and teaching of the ministry, visiting the sick, and doing weddings and funerals, but I also came to realize I'm also responsible for some other organizational deals as well. One of those are the financial operations. Like any church, we have a director of finance/CFO, like any organization has, but that leader is still responsible for the financial pieces.

I remember when I first came in some 17 or 18 years ago, they had to teach me how to read the financial reports, the balance sheet and the cash flow statement and all of these various reports, to get a sense of how we were doing. That balance sheet is incredibly important, because it lists all of the assets, what you own in cash and all of the assets you have, land that you own. Then there are the liabilities that discern what you owe and what your debts are. Then you end up by subtracting the two with your net worth, or the equity that exists in your organization.

Here is Paul. Paul lays out a balance sheet in verses 7-11, and he keeps using this word. He says, "I put up what I had done, and I put up what Jesus Christ has done, and here's what I discovered: everything I did was a loss." He said in verse 7, "Loss." Verse 8: "Loss." Verse 8 again: "Loss." As a matter of fact, he gets down to the end and says, "I consider them all garbage."

Paul says, "I looked at what I did, I looked at what Christ has done, and I discovered all that I thought I was doing...trying to keep the list, trying to be religious...it was a loss." He calls it

*garbage*. It was rubbish. It was trash. It was dung. He said, "All of that had no comparison." He said, "I'm moving my focus now. I've learned that was a waste. Instead, here's what I've learned."

He gets to verse 8 and says these words: "I want to gain Christ. I want to be found in Christ." Then he gets down to verse 10 and says, "**I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.**"

Wait a minute, Paul. You wrote over half the New Testament. You want to know Christ? I mean, Paul, you are in prison now in Rome writing this letter to the people of faith, and you want to know Christ? I mean, Paul, you've seen God heal, you've seen God change, and you want to know Christ? Paul, you've expressed one of the most beautiful statements of the Christology of Christ in Philippians 2, and you want to know Christ?

It is a picture and indicative that when Paul says he wants to know Christ, Paul is not just talking about an intellectual understanding of who Christ is. Paul is not just talking about the facts of Christ. Paul is not just talking about the tone and the tenor and the theology of Christ. Paul is also talking about the experiential experience of Christ. Both are wrapped up in this word *know*. It is the intellectual, but it is also this experience and this encounter and this life with Christ.

Paul says, "I want to know Christ. My focus has changed. I've moved away from a list to a search for the Lord. I've moved from trying to justify myself to being justified in Christ. I have moved to my whole life and my whole priority and my whole focus saying, 'I want to know Christ.'" Is that the focus of your life? Is that the priority in your life?

Friends, it is so easy in life to get so distracted by so many things, particularly in 2020 in which we have encountered and faced so much. It's so easy to get distracted by our jobs and our ambitions and our dreams and our children and our relationships. It is so easy to get distracted, but, friends, I want to encourage you. Make sure that you make this a priority in your life like Paul made it a priority in his life.

Paul says, "I want to know Christ. I want to know him and the power of his resurrection. I want to know him. I want to know and experience this power." It is this power of resurrection that gave Paul such a confidence as he lived, as he encountered struggles and troubles. He knew he served a resurrected Jesus Christ, a Jesus who had defeated death, had defeated sin, had defeated the Enemy. If he could defeat all of that, then he also was the same Jesus who was empowering Paul to live this life for Christ today and empowers your life as well.

There is a power and a victory and an authority to rest on you as a child of God. You and I don't have to be intimidated by a pandemic or finances or political exchanges or health issues. There is a power that rests in you because you serve a resurrected Lord. And the fellowship of his suffering. There is something about suffering that helps you and me to know Christ. There is this relationship there. There is something about suffering in life that allows us to be connected to the sufferings of Christ.

As we suffer, as the church suffers, as we walk through suffering... Even in this room today, there is someone possibly going through suffering at this time. One of our prayers is, "Lord, help us to know you as we go through this suffering. Help us to come closer to you. Help us to be strengthened by you. Help us to experience your power. Help us to experience your support. Help us to experience the company that is found when we suffer as Christ has suffered. You said in your Word if we suffer with you, we will reign with you."

Several years ago in our church, one of our elders went through a terrible car accident. It was so bad he was in ICU for a number of weeks, and while he was there, we really did not know if he would make it or not. We prayed for him, and we sought God for him. We went to visit him, and we prayed with his family. We read Scriptures over him, because we were seeking God. "God, please let him live."

By the grace of God, he was able to eventually move from the ICU to a room until, ultimately, he was able to be rolled out, to walk out of that hospital that we once wondered if he would ever make it out of there again. Eventually, he would make it back to church. At our church at that time, there was a time when after the service, if you had comments or a testimony or wanted to thank the church, you could get up and share.

On that day, he got up and shared some words with the church and said, "I want you to know that it was Jesus Christ who sustained me in the midst of my suffering. I learned who he was in the midst of my difficulty. I just meditated on the Twenty-third Psalm while I was going through my illness. Each day, I would pick a different word. On one day I focused on *the*, and I just talked about how he is *the* Lord; how he is not *a* lord but he is *the* Lord." He said, "The next day I focused on 'He is the *Lord*.' I meditated on how the Lord is my Lord and my leader and my strength."

Then he said, "The next day I focused on 'The Lord *is*.' I focused on not that he was, not that he will be, but he *is* right in this very moment, right on this very day, right in this very situation. Then I focused on 'The Lord is *my*.' I focused on that he's mine, that he belongs to me, that he is my helper." He said, "Then I focused on 'The Lord is my *shepherd*.'" Every day, he would add another word as he would meditate and reflect, and he discovered that he found Jesus in the midst of his suffering.

There's perhaps someone here today who can testify and can say, "That's my story too. I want to know Jesus. I may have walked with him a short period of time" or "I may have walked with him a long period of time, but I want to know Jesus. I want to know him more as I follow him. I want to know him more as I walk through various challenges. I want to know him more as I follow after him. I want to know him more as I work through forgiveness. I want to know him more as I lead my family. I want to know Jesus."

Make that the centerpiece of your life. Don't let it be something left behind. It's easy to get distracted. Make it the center of your life. "I want to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering. I want to know him. Even if life does not turn out like I thought it would or prepared it would, I pray that knowing him is the priority of my life."



You've been there. You went into Walmart. You had a list of the things you wanted to do. You've been there, as I was there. I had one thing I intended to get in Walmart: bread. But you've been there, where you've gone in, and you get the little basket, and you think, "Okay. I only need bread. Let me get bread." And you walk through the aisles, and before long, on this occasion... Have you ever had an occasion where you filled up the little basket and you had to go get a bigger basket, because you came in for one thing, but you kept adding more and more things in?

Then, after I'd finished my shopping, I got in line, I got out, I loaded my car up, I got back home and began to unpack everything I had. One trip turned into many things, and as I unpacked the groceries, I realized the one thing I went to Walmart to get was the one thing I did not buy. I had everything else, chips and lunch meat and milk and everything else, but no bread.

This is a picture of what can happen to you and me in life. We can be so busy picking up so many other things. We can be so busy knowing everything about everybody, and we forget that the priority of our life, the priority of our day, the priority of our week, has to be "I want to know Christ." Lord, forgive us for sometimes our lives being so crowded with our own agendas and our own plans and our own priorities we forget the most important one.

That's why he gets down to this last section, verses 12-14, and he leans this way. Here's the idea: "I'm pressing on." He leaves us with this. He says in verse 12, "**Not that I have already obtained all this...**" He says, "I want you to know I'm not there yet. I haven't arrived. I don't have everything together. I haven't attained everything Christ has called me to. I'm not there."

He warns us. See, the challenge with religion is that religion can lead to complacency. Religious people stop sharing the faith. Religious people stop reaching the lost. Religious people become focused on themselves. Paul says, "I have room to grow. I have not obtained all this. I'm not already there. I'm not already made perfect. No, no, no. I've been in ministry, but I'm not perfect. I've planted churches, but I'm not perfect. I've mentored many, but I'm not perfect. I've preached the gospel to many, but I'm not perfect."

He says, "I have not arrived." Religion would sometimes teach one that you had arrived, that because you did certain things you had arrived, but he said, "I haven't arrived. I'm not perfect. I'm still a work in progress." He'll tell them earlier, "You ought to work out your salvation." He said, "I am a work in progress. Yes, I have been sanctified in Christ, but I am still being sanctified every single day as he works on my life and through my life. I have not arrived."

We've not arrived. We have not arrived in our humility, not arrived in our faith, not arrived in our walk with God, not arrived in our prayer life, not arrived in our evangelism, not arrived in our generosity, not arrived as parents, or not arrived as a couple. We are all works in progress. God is forming himself. Christ is being formed in us every single day.

So, what are we supposed to do, Paul? Paul says, "Forgetting those things..." I forget what is behind. Paul reminds us that we ought to forget those things that make us feel spiritually successful on our own self-righteousness. He said we ought to forget those things. Forget those

things that might make you prideful. Forget those things you might think are the source for where you are today. He said, "I forget what's behind me."

Sometimes it's not just forgetting the good, but sometimes there's some bad we've done, some things we are not proud of, some things that are hindrances in the past. Paul had once persecuted the church, and he had to regularly remind himself of forgetting those things of the past. He reminds us that all of us need to forget our past and forget those things that will hinder us from running this race for Christ. This theme or idea of running the race is the metaphor he drops in.

He says, "I want you to press on. I want you to strain for the cause of the high calling of Jesus Christ." He says, "I am straining, I am pressing toward the prize for the call." I want you to catch this, friends. When he says this, he is reminding us "I am pressing. I am straining." This context has an eschatological context to it, which means on one side, there is something he is pressing toward today.

He's pressing today to honor Christ, pressing today to follow Christ fully, pressing today to know Christ. There also is an end times, future times reference in the text too. He knows he will not fully know Christ until he sees Christ face-to-face and he will be made like Christ. So, on one side, there is a pressing I'm doing today, but on the other side, there's a pressing that I know won't happen until I see Christ again, until Christ returns.

He says on both sides, "I am pressing. I know this life will not give me all I long for or fully have, but I am pressing every day of my life to honor him and to seek him and to follow after him." I have to press past my past. I have to press past my struggles, but I have to press toward knowing him more and more every single day.

This past fall has definitely brought us life's challenges. My daughter is a college freshman, and I have been moved by watching her navigate through this fall semester. It has been a crazy year for her. She graduated at our home as we watched a virtual graduation. Her principal brought her diploma to the front porch, and there we took pictures as best we could. I watched her as she had to navigate through a year being interrupted.

She had dreamed of going off to school, and we were supporting her 100 percent, but in the fall, of course, she didn't get to move away to go to school in Atlanta as she had planned. Instead, she was at home. She had to press through all of her expectations and hopes and ambitions that she had longed for, but she kept on pressing. She pressed through, and I watched her as she would be at home online with classes, as she would go through the material and do group projects and do presentations all online.

I watched her press through as she would try to navigate through them. Then this past Wednesday she took her last final, and we were so proud of her. I said, "I'm so proud of you for how you have pressed through so many things and how you have adjusted and how you have managed. You were pressing. You let nothing hold you back, because you were pressing to finish this first semester. I'm proud of you. Congratulations on your first semester. You've done an amazing job. You've had to press through."

In many respects, that's what the Christian life is about sometimes. It's about pressing past your own selfish ambitions, pressing past thinking religion will satisfy, pressing past unexpected things happening, pressing past ambitions and dreams that didn't turn out like we had thought, pressing past people who may not have been as supportive as they should have been, pressing past societal issues and cultural issues, but pressing toward the mark of the high calling of Jesus Christ; pressing past pleasing people and saying, "I want to please Jesus Christ." That is my hope. That is our desire. That is our goal.

Father, we come to you today, and we simply pray that we want to honor you. We are pressing toward you. We are pressing toward you as men, as women, as brothers and sisters. We are pressing toward you. We want to honor you. We want to serve you. We want to commit to you. So, Lord, we put our lives in your hands, we put our families in your hands, we put our futures, and we say, "We want to know Christ more and more every single day." In Jesus' name we pray, amen.