

Sunday February 19, 2023 | Philippians 3:12-18

In Chapter 3 Paul has been pointing out that we should have no confidence in the flesh. Our relationship with Jesus did not start by the flesh, human effort, and it does not continue by the flesh. Instead of pursuing things in the flesh Paul has been sharing what his aim of life is.

Paul aimed High, he desired:

-(v.8) to gain Christ, (v.9) to be found in Christ by others, (v.10) to experientially know Christ, (v.10) to experientially know the power of the resurrection, (v.10) to share in the sufferings and death of Christ

And ultimately Paul wanted to attain (v.11) the “Out resurrection” from the dead, which is most likely a reward for pursuing a deepening relationship with Christ.

Wuest’s translation of verses 10-11 does a great job in capturing Paul’s heart:

“Yes, for His sake I have been caused to forfeit all things, and I count them but dung, **in order that I might come to know Him in an experiential way, and to come to know experientially the power of His resurrection**, and a joint-participation in His sufferings, being brought to the place where my life will radiate a likeness to His death, **if by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, the out-resurrection** out from among those who are dead.”

This was Paul’s goal and his pursuit of life. He poured himself into it. These next verses will give us insight to how Paul pursued these goals.

Philippians 3:12 ESV

(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**.

Paul did not think that he had arrived at these goals. He is describing his desire, what he wants to attain. He did not see himself as perfect. He saw a relationship with Christ being a continually pursuit. This pursuit is only possible because Jesus has made us His own. Meaning we can grow and mature now that we are saved. Before Christ we are called dead in our sin. You never tell a non-believer, someone dead, to press on. They can’t. But as believers, there is not a more important message. **PRESS ON! Progress not perfection.**

Philippians 3:13 ESV

(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,

The phrase “made it my own” means to pursue and overtake, or to take and capture. They didn’t have football back then, but this word is the perfect picture of a defender chasing down a running back and trying to tackle him. Paul says, I have not tackled these goals yet, but I am chasing them down. I am chasing Him down. Paul did not see perfection as possible this side of heaven. But he wanted to pursue the deepest walk with Jesus possible. He wants to press towards the goal, and verse 13 describes what helps him in this pursuit.

Philippians 3:13 ESV

(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,**

Paul knows He needs to forget what lies behind. You can't begin to press on, to move forward if you keep looking back. We tend to stay focused on the past, both the good and the bad. I love this principal because it applies to both. If there is a past sin, or season of your life that Satan accuses you with, then this is a great verse for you. Forget what lies behind. Once our sin has been confessed it is forgiven. We don't have to keep looking back at it. Paul had firsthand experience with this. He had been a persecutor of the church. Think about how often Satan tried to distract and discourage Paul with those thoughts. Memories of what He had done. These sins had been confessed. We need to forget what lies behind.

Forgetting what lies behind can also apply to past seasons of growth. We don't forget what we have learned, but we cannot live in the past. Our relationship with Christ should be more exciting today than it's ever been.

Philippians 3:13-14 ESV

(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.

Paul never hits a point where he is satisfied with his growth. He strains forward. He presses on. When we hold a season of growth up and live in the past, we aren't pressing forward. Legalism keeps looking back. Think about the Judaizers, they taught you had to be circumcised. A one-time action of the flesh to have confidence in. There is no growth or moving forward in that thinking. Paul has confidence in what Jesus has done for Him and He wants to keep pursuing Him with everything.

The word press on means to pursue. It can be used of a foot race. It is active, earnest, passionate. It is never letting off the gas pedal. Scripture has plenty of examples of people who did not press on. Hezekiah is one of them. He started out great.

2 Chronicles 31:20-21 ESV

(20) Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah, and he did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God.

(21) And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, **seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered.**

Hezekiah was passionate about his relationship with God. He pursued it with all his heart. Scripture has a lot to say about the reforms, and stances for truth he took. He even was able to remove the high places. In 2 Kings 20 he becomes deathly ill and pleads with God to extend his life. God answers the prayer and is willing to give Hezekiah 15 more years. If anyone should have been motivated to press on it should have been Hezekiah. He almost died. He was given more time, what was he going to do with it?

2 Chronicles 32:24-25 ESV

(24) In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death, and he prayed to the LORD, and He answered him and gave him a sign.

(25) **But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud.** Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem.

God answered his prayer and extended his life. But he did not respond according to this blessing. He did not press on. He let pride slip in. He had cheated death and took pride in it. An envoy from Babylon comes and He shows off and shows them all the riches and treasures. God is not pleased by this and pronounces a judgment through Isaiah.

2 Kings 20:17-18 ESV

(17) Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD.

(18) **And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."**

All the riches he showed off, will be taken by the Babylonians. Some of his own family will be taken as slaves to be eunuchs. Look at his initial reaction to this news. It shows that He is not pursuing a walk with God like he used to.

2 Kings 20:19 ESV

(19) Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." **For he thought, "Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?"**

As long as it doesn't affect me, then fine. He is not pressing on, straining forward to the goal. He is coasting in and wants to enjoy his last 15 years. **He will eventually repent, but this extra time God gave Him is such a waste.** He will have a son named Manasseh. Who will start reigning at 12 (2 Kings 21:1), meaning Manasseh was born during these extended 15 years. Hezekiah does a terrible job of teaching his son. Manasseh is one of the most wicked Kings of Israel. Manasseh will sacrifice his own son to idols.

2 Kings 21:9 ESV

(9) But they did not listen, and **Manasseh led them astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel.**

Hezekiah was given an extra 15 years. It was some of the worst spiritual years of his life. He let pride slip in and didn't train up His son in spiritual things. Scripture does say that Hezekiah never departs from God. **He didn't start worshipping idols, or bring back the high places. But He stopped pressing on.** He stopped being excited about what God had for Him. Stories like Hezekiah haunted Paul, and they should serve as a warning for us. **No amount of past growth will sustain our current walk.** We are to press on, strain forward. Forget what is in the past, as a believer God has something amazing for you right now. That why we are still here. We are called to press on, to gain Christ, and know Him. **This kind of excitement is only possible in the spirit. The flesh will be tired and ready to coast.** Life in the Spirit looks upward.

Philippians 3:14 ESV

(14) I **press on** toward the goal **for the prize** of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

We have a prize in front of us. Do you want it? Rewards have been so neglected in teaching in the modern church. Scripture has so much to say about them. Our walk with Christ is so much bigger than our salvation. We have been called to press on to the goal.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 ESV

(9) So whether we are at home or away, **we make it our aim to please Him**.

(10) **For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

I can guarantee you that Hezekiah wishes he could use those last 15 years differently. Once time is gone, it cannot be brought back. This is why we need to forget what lie behind. If we keep looking at times when we didn't grow regretting them, we will only cost ourselves even more time. We have the present right now. Press on, pursue Him. Jesus promises His reward is coming with Him.

Revelation 22:12-13 NAS95

(12) "Behold, I am coming quickly, and **My reward is with Me**, to render to every man according to what he has done.

(13) "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

What I find amazing about this chapter, is everything Paul was pursuing was a deepening relationship with Jesus. He talks about it multiple ways but he is pursuing Jesus. The amazing thing that comes from pursuing Christ is the rich rewards that will come with Him. Pressing on toward Jesus and His reward is a mark of maturity.

Philippians 3:15-16 ESV

(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**.

The most mature believers I know, have never let of the gas. They have been pressing on in the Spirit's power. What they do has changed and shifted, but their Spirit enabled pursuit of Jesus is just as excited than it ever was.

We are never perfect, but as we mature God grows this desire for more of Him. If you don't think this way, then God will have to reveal it to you. Paul says hold on to what you have. Don't slip back. If you have grown to a certain point, continue. Don't slip.

2 John 1:8 ESV

(8) Watch yourselves, so that you **may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward**.

There is no neutral in our relationship with Jesus. Either we are pressing on and growing

towards Him through the power of the Spirit. Or we are slipping, not holding to what we have attained and missing what He has for us right now. Paul wanted to be an example of living this out.

Philippians 3:17 ESV

(17) Brothers, join in imitating me, and **keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.**

This idea of pressing on sounds so foreign and strange. We struggle to know what it looks like. Paul encourages believers to look at himself and the example of other believers in our lives. Watch the believers who tackle their relationship with Jesus this way. Imitate them. As we do this be careful to put no confidence in the flesh. All men are sinners and anyone can let you down, but we should be encouraged by the example of those who are pressing on.

William Borden is an example like this. He was born in Chicago in 1887, to a very wealthy family. His mother was a devout believer and she poured into William. When he graduated High School at 16 the family gave him a trip around the world. As He traveled the world God worked on his heart and gave him a heart for those he saw. This is a quote from a letter he wrote.

“I am beginning to see what a wonderful storehouse of good things the Bible is. I pray every day for all my dear family. **I also pray that God will take my life into His hands and use it for the furtherance of His Kingdom as He sees best.** I feel sure that He will answer my prayer. [...] I have so much of everything in this life, and there are so many millions who have nothing and live in darkness! I don’t think it is possible to realise it until one sees the East. I know it is no easy thing to serve the Lord, but others have been enabled to do so, and there is no reason why I should not.”

He decided to become a missionary after his schooling. Friends and some family members thought he was throwing his life away. It is said that He wrote in the back of his bible “**No Reserves.**” He went to Yale and pursued Christ with energy. He started Bible Studies and prayer groups on campus and by the end of his 4 years there 1,000 out of 1,300 students were attending a group. He helped start Yale Hope Mission, and was constantly focused on learning the Word. When he graduated Yale he was offered many high paying jobs, even positions in the family company and he turned them all down. He wrote in his bible “**No Retreats.**”

He ended up going to Princeton seminary, and had a heart for the students around him. He was concerned about the liberal drift at the seminary and sought to pull people back to the truth of the word of God. He continued to pursue his call to over sea missions, specifically to the Chinese Muslim population. He went to Egypt to study Arabic, while there he contracted spinal meningitis and died within a month at 25. During this time sick in bed he wrote one last phrase in his bible, under the other two. “**No Regrets.**”

William Borden pursued Christ at each stage of his life. He didn’t think his life would

start when he became a missionary. He wanted to live for Christ each day. He wanted to press on. **No Reserves, No Retreats, No Regrets.** On his grave is written the inscription **“Apart from faith in Christ there is no explanation for such a life.”**

There really isn't any other explanation. By the lens of the flesh his life was a waste, but in the eyes of the spirit, Borden had pressed on until He was called home. We are told to imitate believers like this. There is a great power of living in the Spirit. This week will be the one-year anniversary of our former pastor Jim Henderson going home to be with Christ. He was another example of pressing on to the end.

Philippians 3:17 ESV

(17) Brothers, join in imitating me, and **keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.**

This verse seems so odd to us. We are told to keep our eyes which means observe and watch the lives of other believers. We are to see that pressing on in our relationship with Jesus is possible. The key is that as we observe the example of Godly believers **they point us to Jesus.**

Hebrews 12:1-2 NAS95

- (1) Therefore, since **we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us**, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
- (2) **fixing our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

In contrast to the word observe, this idea to fix our eyes means to direct one's attention without distraction. God gives us human examples of pressing on, as we are to fix our focus without distraction onto Jesus. It is about Him. We are to be enamored with Him. To press on towards Him. The sad reality is some don't.

Philippians 3:18 ESV

(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.

Yes even believers can walk as enemies of the cross. James makes that very clear.

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.**

If we make ourselves friends with the world that means we are focused on the things of the flesh. It means we are not pressing on. Time is too important to waste.

Listen to what Paul is able to say at the end of his life. I would love to be able to say the same

thing one day and I want to encourage you. Press on. Forget what lies behind and let's strain ahead to the great call of knowing Jesus and walking with Him.

2 Timothy 4:6-8 ESV

(6) For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

(7) **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**

(8) Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and **not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.**