

“**7** But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. **8** 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 **9** 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. **10** I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11** and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead (**Philippians 3:7-11, NIV**).”

Life is a journey. It's full of ups and downs, highs and lows, hills and valleys. The older I get the more I begin to realize this truth, and the older I get the more life begins to change. We just celebrated Christmas this past week, and I don't know about you, but Christmas is a really special time of year to me. I've always loved it—the lights, the tree, the gifts, the cards, the candlelight services...I love it all!

One thing that I've noticed as I've gotten older is that Christmas has changed over the years for me. All those things I named earlier are important parts of Christmas, but what really makes Christmas special is the people you spend it with, and one of the inevitable parts about the journey of life is that the people you spend Christmas with changes. Family members pass away, we get married, new people join the party. It's normal. It's part of life. It's part of Christmas.

But as time passes by, something else begins to change to-us. We get older and wiser. We start to think about certain things differently. We begin to go about life differently. The things we use to value don't seem as important, and the things we used to take for granted become what is most precious to us. Not only that, the things we look forward to are different. They're not quite as hollow and insignificant as they used to be. This is what has happened to Paul by the time he writes the Scripture we read in Philippians.

In the passage that we read to start off today, Paul is writing to a congregation of people who he knows well and has a great deal of respect for. He's writing to a church at Philippi that he started and has since left in the hands of trusted overseers. Philippi was a prosperous Roman colony named after King Philipp II of Macedonia, the Father of Alexander the Great. The people of Philippi were Roman, and they were proud of it. Many of them had served in the Roman army and were given land in Philippi as part of their retirement.

When these Philippians encountered the gospel—everything changed. **They encountered a new king, named Jesus, and a new citizenship not of this Earth.** They most likely did not have much Jewish influence in their lives, and would have had to learn what it meant to be followers of Jesus, not from a foundation of Old Testament texts, but from the instruction of Paul.

Philippians ironically, is considered to be Paul's most encouraging letter. This is ironic because at the time he writes it, he is locked up in a Roman prison. Nevertheless, Paul has gotten older and wiser, and he wants to write to this church at Philippi for a couple of reasons. Number one, he wants to thank them for their support. Paul makes it clear that the church at Philippi had sent him some sort of gift while he had been in prison. However, he also wants to do two other very important things: warn them against false teachers and encourage them to rejoice no matter the circumstances.

Maybe as you are reading this, you are a person in need of encouragement today. Maybe Christmas did not go the way you wanted it to go. Maybe this entire year has not gone the way that you wanted it to go. Today, if you are in need of encouragement you have come to the right place! We're going to look at three different lessons we can learn from Paul's writing in Philippians chapter 3, and prayerfully you will leave encouraged!

LESSON 1: KNOWLEDGE COMES FROM EXPERIENCE

What is knowledge? According to the Oxford dictionary, knowledge is “facts, information, and skills acquired by a person through experience or education” or “the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.” This definition states that the way one goes about acquiring knowledge is through experience or education. That’s true. We all can look back over our lives and think of lessons we learned through education, and we could do the same with lessons we learned through experience. However, I would argue that while knowledge can be acquired through experience or education, **the best way to gain knowledge is through experience AND education.**

When you are choosing what doctor you are going to go to...what makes for the best doctors? Well, you cannot be a doctor if you do not have the education. You cannot be a doctor if you did not go to school to be a doctor. However, we all agree that we also want a doctor with some experience; not right out of med school. Let’s think about your car...when you’re having car trouble, what type of mechanic do you want? I don’t know about you, but I want a mechanic who has gone to school to get all of their certifications, AND has the experience of working on cars for quite some time.

For our context today, as well as for Paul in Philippians 3, the knowledge we are most concerned with is not that of a doctor or a mechanic, but the knowledge of God. In verse 10, Paul states “I want to know Christ...” When Paul says this, he does not mean he wants to know of Christ and he does not mean he wants to know about Christ. When Paul says that he wants to know Christ, he means that he wants to know him in a relational, personal way, that only comes through lived experience with one another. Paul is saying that he wants to know Christ in the sense that he wants his own life to take the same shape as the life of Christ. That does not happen through education alone, but only through experience with God.

Paul understood that knowing Christ is not learned—it's lived. I am not saying that education, or Christian education does not matter. It does. I believe in it. I participate in it. I invest in it. However, what I am saying is that the knowledge of God that Paul is desiring cannot be obtained through education alone.

Paul had dedicated his life to the study of God. What do I mean by that? Remember, Paul was not always a Christian. He was once a Pharisee who persecuted the Church. Even in the same chapter we have been reading from today, Paul states:

“**1** 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. **2** Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. **3** 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— **4** though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: **5** 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; **6** as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless (**Philippians 3:1-6, NIV**).”

Paul describes himself here as a Pharisee. In some translations of the Bible it would even say a “Pharisee of Pharisees.” He admits to persecuting the Church, but claims the reason why he did so was because of his zeal for the righteousness of God. Why does that matter? What does that mean? That means that when Paul was hunting down Christians, he did so because he actually thought that's what God wanted him to do.

Paul was a man passionate for God...there was only one problem—he had never met him before.

How could that be? After all, Paul was a Pharisee. When we think about Pharisees today, we think about them as the villains of the New Testament, but they actually were

very devout Jews, and of all the religious sects at the time of Jesus, believe it or not, they actually had the most in common with him.

As a Pharisee, Paul would have gone through an extensive educational journey. Like all other Jewish boys, from ages 5-12, Paul would have been educated on the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), and would have memorized large portions of it. This is when most education stopped for a Jewish boy in Paul's time, but only the best and brightest students would move on to the next section of education. From ages 13-17, Paul would have been taught to memorize the written and oral law of the Old Testament—that's over 600 laws. Then as someone preparing to be a Pharisee, Paul received one-on-one training from age 18-30 from a respected Rabbi. We know that Paul's mentorship came from a Rabbi named Gamiliel, one of the most respected Rabbis in all of Judaism.

Paul spent 25 years being formally educated every day on the Old Testament scriptures and the ways of God...and he still did not recognize him when he showed up on the scene. BUT...all that changed in Acts chapter 9 on the Road to Damascus. You know the story right? Paul has received a letter from the Jewish authorities to go to Damascus and have Christians arrested, on the way he has an encounter with a man named Jesus that goes like this:

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. **4** He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

5 “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked.

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied. **6** “Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. **8** Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. **9** For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything (**Acts 9:3-9, NIV**).

On his way to Damascus, Paul met Jesus. What he had spent 25 years trying to do through his education, happened in a one encounter with Jesus.

The only problem is now Paul is blind. So God sends a man named Ananias to Paul to pray for him and help him regain his sight. Ananias goes to find Paul, prays for him, and sure enough he regains his sight and is baptized as a Christian.

Do not hear what I am not saying—I am not saying that being educated in the Scriptures does not matter. It does. In fact Paul's education is going to play a big part in what makes him so effective in ministry, however, what I am saying is that if you want to know God, it is not enough to know about him or know of him. You have to know him through lived experience. You have to set aside time to meet with him. You have to walk with him and talk with him. You have to obey him. You have to encounter his presence.

The first thing we can learn from Paul today is that **knowledge comes from experience.**

LESSON 2: POWER COMES WITH PARTICIPATION

If we go back to our main passage for today, Philippians 3:10-14, right after Paul says that he wants to “know Christ,” he adds a bit of clarification. He says that he wants to “know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings.” **Paul wants to know the power of his resurrection AND the participation in his sufferings.**

If I were to go to the Wayne County fair next year and purchase two booths side by side. One would have a sign over top that said “line up here if you want to experience the power of Christ’s resurrection,” and the other would have a sign over top that said “line up here if you want to experience participation in the sufferings of Christ,” I think we know which line would be longer.

But here’s the deal—**the resurrection and the suffering of Christ cannot be separated.** If you want to experience his resurrection, you will experience his suffering. Why? Because power comes with participation.

Next week is New Years, which means that for many of us we are heading back to Planet Fitness next week. When we get there, we’ll probably set some type of goal for ourselves. Maybe we want to go 3 times a week, maybe we want to go 4, maybe we want to go every day. But maybe, just maybe, you’ll see the most buff guy or gal in there and say to yourself “I want to look like them!” Guess what? It is not going to happen just because that is what we want. We are not going to meet our fitness goals if we go to the gym for the month of January and do not return until the following January.

Everyone wants power. Not everyone wants to participate in the obedience required to access the power. Don’t get it twisted, there is nothing you are going to do to earn the power of God in your life. However, what unlocks the power of God in your life is your obedience to his will for you!

Please do not misunderstand me, I am not saying that we receive the power of God on a transactional basis. It is not as simple as if we do “this,” God will do “that.” **Our**

obedience does not create God's power, but it does position us to participate in what he already wants to do!

Let's think back to the gym for just a second. You are not going to get stronger because you go to the gym. You are probably not going to get more fit by using a plan you had chatgpt make for you that you took with you to planet fitness. But if you hire a trainer, if you go to crossfit and take classes there, you will. WHY? Because there is someone stronger than you who is showing you the way. They are asking things of you and you are obeying them. This is scientifically proven. People who have a trainer have better results than people who go on their own! Why? because their will for you is stronger than your will for you and your commitment to that person is stronger than your desire for improvement.

God's will for your life is better than yours, and the key to you obtaining it is not that you do something to earn it, but that you commit yourself to Jesus Christ, the one who already has earned it. And guess what? If you are committed to Christ, you participate in his plan by obedience...and in turn be in position to receive the fulness of life he intends for you!

One of the best things you can do in preparation for 2026 is to decide on December 28th, 2025, that you are going to obey Christ no matter what! **It isn't going to be easy, but it is going to be worth it!**

Let's take a look back at our passage and see what else Paul has to say—

"10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:10-11, NIV)."

So far, the two lessons we have learned have been pretty concrete and straightforward: (1) knowledge comes from experience, and (2) power comes with participation. However, life is not always concrete and straightforward. This next lesson we learn maybe isn't so much that way either.

LESSON 3: RESURRECTION REQUIRES A “SOMEHOW”

When I was studying this passage a few weeks ago, there was one word in particular that stood out to me, and honestly, it was that word that led me to speak on this passage today—"somehow." Somehow is an interesting word. It means "in some way, by some means," and here Paul uses the word "somehow" to describe the miracle of "attaining to the resurrection from the dead."

It is mysterious, curious, and beautiful, that even one of the smartest theologians to ever live, the Apostle Paul, used the word “somehow” before describing the resurrection that he would one day obtain because of Christ. However, he does not use this word because he is uncertain of his salvation, or because he does not know how the resurrection will take place.

Paul uses the word “somehow” because in his humility he understands that even though he has come a long way, planted many churches, led many people to Christ, and suffered greatly for it, that he is still just a sinner saved by grace. Paul knows that he did not earn and does not deserve the resurrection that he will one day enjoy. He says it like this in his letter to the Ephesians, “**8** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—**9** not by works, so that no one can boast (**Ephesians 2:8-9, NIV**).”

For a person like Paul, a person like me, and a person like you, the only reason we are able to be saved and one day be raised from the dead is the grace of God. You cannot and will not earn it. Paul didn’t earn it either, he wasn’t born into it, he didn’t deserve it. Yet he knew that “somehow” when he closed his eyes for the final time on this earth he would soon open them in eternity, standing face to face, with the one who created him, died for him, and took ahold of him on that Damascus Road.

Paul did not use the word “somehow” because he was dumb, he used it because he knew he had been delivered. Delivered from the fate he deserved, delivered from the path he was on, and delivered from an eternity separated from God. That’s amazing. That’s miraculous. That has the ability to befuddle even the brightest of scholars if they’re being honest. Paul understood in his mind how this could happen, but in his heart it still felt like a fresh miracle.

Paul continues on in verse 12 to state, “**12** 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. **13** 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, **14** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (**Philippians 3:12-14, NIV**).”

Paul knew, and wanted to let the Philippians know, that he was still a work in progress. While he was confident in his salvation he had yet to arrive at this resurrection, the end goal of his journey with Christ. It’s here where Paul says this amazing line, “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” What a statement—“I press on.”

Pressing on can feel difficult. I don't know about you, but when I think of pressing on, I think of the movie *Forrest Gump*. Maybe it's because it is one of my favorite movies, but if you've seen it before, perhaps you know what I'm talking about. For his whole life, Forrest pressed on. As a kid, he pressed on past the bullies that tortured him and the limitations that tried to stop him. As a teenager he pressed on becoming a football star. As a young adult he pressed on through the swamps of Vietnam with Bubba. After that he pressed on with his shrimp boat business with Lieutenant Dan. Then he pressed on as he ran across America! You get the picture. Slowly but surely, he keeps moving forward!

Maybe you're reading this today, and you feel like you can't move forward anymore. You'd say "Pastor Dylan, I don't feel like I can keep pressing on...I can't keep moving forward." You'd say something like "I don't feel like I can take another step." "I don't feel like I can forget the past." "I don't feel like I can move forward."

Maybe you'd say "Well, Pastor, I could move forward if I was heading to a prize like Paul." Here's the thing about the prize Paul is talking about, it's not an earthly one; it's a heavenly reward.

But I get it. **Pressing on is hard. It's a struggle. But it is a struggle that Paul took hold of, because he knew who had taken hold of him.**

Maybe you don't know that. Maybe you don't know whose you are. Maybe you don't know that you've been bought with a price. Remember—resurrection requires a "somehow."

In fact, every miracle that has ever happened required a "somehow." That's what makes it a miracle. There was an element of what happened that was miraculous that cannot be fully explained. Sure, maybe you understand it in your mind, but in your heart you're still just in awe of the goodness of God. That's how Paul was with the resurrection from the dead. He knew how it happened in his mind, but in his heart he was still in shock that it could happen for him!

There are some of you reading this right now who need a miracle. You have a sick family member who **somehow** needs to be healed. You have a family that **somehow** needs to be repaired. You have bills that **somehow** have to get paid. You have a son or daughter who **somehow** has to come back to the faith. Guess what? I've got good news for you—

"SOMEHOW" IS HIS SPECIALTY

When I look across the Bible, I see example after example of how God somehow did the impossible. He somehow showed up time and time again for his people. He **somehow** created the world and everything in it. He **somehow** made man from the dust of the Earth. When Abraham was going to sacrifice his son, he **somehow** provided a lamb. When the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt he **somehow** led them out. When they were stuck between an army and the red sea he **somehow** split it in two. When they didn't know how they were going to defeat Jericho, he **somehow** tore down the walls. When David stood before Goliath he **somehow** slayed the giant.

When we get to the new testament he **somehow** came down from heaven to earth as a baby. That baby became a man and **somehow** healed the sick, **somehow** gave sight to the blind, **somehow** made the lame walk, **somehow** raised the dead, and **somehow** died on the cross for you and me, rising again on the third day so that we might have everlasting life, as Paul said earlier, “**somehow**, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

Don't you see? **God is in the business of “somehow.”**

I see it every day, and you can too. Just look around. I can look around this room and see your faces, I see your stories, I see your somehow. I see how **somehow** cancer is no match for God. I see how **somehow** families can be restored. I see how somehow lost people are saved here every week. I see how **somehow** God can take a bunch of teenagers and turn a school upside down for Jesus Christ. And I can see that **somehow God still wants to do something new in your life today.**

You can trust him. Put your faith in him. Call on his name, and like Paul, you too will be saved!