

Renewal of Focus

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. The scripture this morning comes from Philippians chapter 3 starting in verse 7 through verse 14.

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.

[1 : 11] 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 of this. Or have already arrived at my goal. But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus has taken 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 towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well it is my honor and privilege to open God's word with you this morning.

And to see what it is that God wants to share with each one of us. And so to that end I'm going to pray. But as I pray and as I pray for you. I would ask that you would pray for yourself.

[2 : 24] That God would open your heart and mind. And that you would pray for me as well. That as I preach that we would hear God's words and not mine. So let us pray together. God of grace and mercy.

God of mystery and presence. We ask this morning that you would come and inhabit this space. I pray that you would fill each one of us with the power of your spirit.

That you would open up our hearts and minds to hear the words that you have for us this morning. God I pray that you would empty me of myself. For this morning we do not need to hear from me. We need to hear from you.

And so I pray now that you would fill me with the power of your Holy Spirit. And that your words would speak. That we would take your words and apply them to our lives as we walk out of here today. And now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart.

Be acceptable in your sight oh Lord. My strength. And my redeemer. Amen. I'm a very mediocre baseball coach. And I would submit to you as evidence of my mediocrity.

[3 : 31] The record of my teams across many years that have not been good. A lot of losses. A tie one time. Not very many wins.

And so as a mediocre coach you're there and you're like well what I'm doing is not working. So what are some positives that we can draw? We got really good at finding the silver linings in the losses. So even when you lose by 20 runs you can find some sort of positive thing that somebody did at some point. That you can point to and say well he ran really hard on his way to first when he got out.

But every once in a while there was a moment that was really really good. And we had one of those moments where in the midst of one of those games. And we're starting to lose and the kids are kind

of getting down on themselves.

And one of my sons came up to bat. And the kid threw the pitch. And my son hit the ball. And it went over the fence. Not foul but fair for a home run.

[4 : 33] It was exciting. It was incredible. It was the greatest moment of the season up to that point. Parents in the stands are going crazy. The coaches were so excited. And the kids come piling out of the dugout.

He's rounding the bases. He's coming around third. There's a huge victory party there ready to celebrate. And he gets totally distracted. Because there's all his teammates on the field and he's slapping high fives.

And he never touches the plate. And he starts to run back to the dugout. And I'm screaming touch the plate. Touch the plate.

You've got to touch the plate. And everybody's like what is happening? He lost focus. Of what was the most important thing.

When you hit a home run. Yes the ball goes over the fence and the work is done. But you actually have to finish. You've got to go touch the plate. Paul in his letter to the church at Philippi here.

[5 : 33] Is reminding them that the work is done. But they have to finish the job. And I think very often. We're just like this church in Philippi.

That we lose focus. And when we lose focus. We miss the point. We get so distracted by all of the exciting things that are going on around us. That we forget what it is that we're actually supposed to be doing.

And we major in the minor. And we forget to finish the job. And so Paul here gives us some things. That I think can help us renew our focus.

And the first thing that he tells us. Is to forsake what holds you back. Right? He gives this whole thing and he says. But whatever gain I now count as loss.

In the verses leading up to this. Paul has given this whole list of criteria. Area. And he said. I don't count any of that worth anything. I count it all as loss. Before we had kids.

[6 : 33] I was kind of into backpacking. And my friends and I. We would go and we would backpack in these areas. And every trip I was always evaluating. And thinking about. Was this worth having the weight in my pack?

Is this something that's going to help me accomplish the goal that I have. Of getting down the trail and back? Or is this something that's going to hinder me? And so I'm weighing things.

So I'm weighing my tarp. And my tarp weighs 15 ounces. But if I get a piece of Tyvek. That only weighs 5 ounces. And so what do I take?

Or I'm looking at my flashlight. And then I have the big mag light. But that weighs 3 pounds. And has D batteries. But if I take my headlamp. Well that has triple A batteries. And that only weighs 17 ounces.

So which do I take? And so I was constantly evaluating things. And taking things out. To forsake the things that held me back. From accomplishing my purposes. Not that they were bad.

[7 : 32] There's nothing wrong with a tarp or a mag light. But it wasn't the best thing to propel me forward. To help me achieve the goal. That I wanted to achieve. And so Paul here.

Is giving us this illustration. He's saying forsake the things that hold you back. And he gives us this huge list. Of all of his former gains. His inherited social. And heritage status.

His credentials. His education. His certifications. His devotion. His reputation. All of these things. That I would suggest.

Probably are similar to some of the things. That we have in our own lives. And some of the things that may. Be present. For us. And Paul is saying.

I don't need any of those things. Those things are all. A loss now. And he's echoing Christ.

Because. One chapter before. In Philippians 2. Paul has given us the example.

[8 : 32] And he says. Your lifestyle should be like that. Of Christ Jesus. Who did not consider equality with God. As something to be grasped. But instead. Emptied himself.

Of all of his divinity. And made himself nothing. Taking the form. Of a servant. For our sake. And Paul is saying.

If Jesus. Who is fully God. Can give that up. How much more so. Can I give up all of these things. That I've accumulated. That I'm now finding my worth.

And my identity in. How much more can I give those things up. But then he goes one further. And he says. Not only do I count them as a loss. But I count them as garbage. Now it's interesting. The translation chooses garbage. And I understand why they did that. But in the original language. Paul's. Paul's word that he uses here. Is much stronger. The word that he actually uses.

[9 : 28] Is the poop emoji. Or. Dirty diapers. Very strong language. Now listen. I'm the father of twins.

I have a lot. Of experience with dirty diapers. And that is a thing. That I don't want around. If there's a dirty diaper around. I want it to be as far away.

From me as possible. I have absolutely zero desire. To hang out. With dirty diapers. That's just not a thing. That I'm interested in. At any stage of my life.

I have. So Paul is saying. These accomplishments. These things that I've done. They're like that. So true discipleship.

Discipleship. The following of Jesus. If we call ourselves. Christians. If we claim to be followers of Jesus. True discipleship requires. Letting go.

[10 : 25] Of the self-reliance. Of the self-identity. And requires us. To instead. Find. Our faith.

And our identity. In the grace. Of Jesus Christ. We have to let go. Of the false religious securities. That we find ourselves in. Our religious acts. Become a response.

To salvation. Salvation. That has been given to us. By grace. Through faith. And our religious activities. Become a response.

To salvation. Not the cause. Of our salvation. And then. When we look. And we see all of these things. All of these certifications.

Right? All this stuff that Paul. Had. The religious heritage. Our racial identity. Our certifications. And zeal.

[11 : 20] Our education. Our knowledge. Our study. All of this stuff. That we have. We look at those experiences. And they become an instrument.

Not a platform. They become something that God. Is using in our lives. To shape and mold us. And that we can use. To the glory of God. To help other people.

Not. A platform. For us to stand on. So that people can look at us. And say how great we are. It's become something to be used.

For the glory of God. Not. Something to promote. Myself. And so I'd ask you the question. This morning. What are you still standing on?

Where are you still trusting your own effort? To earn salvation. Or in my case. To find your worth. In who you are.

[12 : 19] In where you came from. In what your social circles are. In what your standing is. At work. Or in the community. Where are you finding your identity?

Is that in Christ? Or is that in what you do? And Paul is telling us. Forsake those things. Because they are holding you back.

But if we're forsaking things. Then we have to give. We have to be going somewhere. And so Paul is telling us. To forsake what holds us back. But he's also saying. Follow Christ.

As your true gain. Because it's no good. To let go of all of these things. And put them down. And not move on from them.

Because I know. In my own life. That if I take something. And I put it down beside me. And I don't move. What am I going to do? I'm just going to pick it back up. So if we're forsaking all these things.

[13 : 15] And we're letting go of them. It doesn't do any good. If we stay in the same place.

Because the temptations. Will still continue to come. And so Paul. Is telling us. That we need to follow Christ.

As our true gain. And to follow Christ. Is to receive his righteousness. Not our own. And following Christ. Comes through grace.

Right? Paul tells us in Ephesians. For it is by grace. You have been saved through faith. Not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not of works. So that no one can boast.

But he doesn't leave us there. He says. For you are God's workmanship. Created to do good works. Which God has ordained before you. So God has set us up.

To where following Christ. Is an act of righteousness. That has been set up. By God for us to do. As a result of our salvation. Not as the cause of our salvation.

[14:11] And when you're following. It becomes a priority shift. When we are following Jesus truly. All of those things. That we now.

Used to find our identity in. Now become ancillary. And secondary. And the priority shift has moved. To where now my focus is on Christ.

And the things of Christ. And doing what glorifies God. Not what glorifies and satisfies myself. And so God will use those things.

But to his glory. And so the priority shift changes. To where we're experiencing. Jesus resurrection power. We're sharing in Jesus sufferings.

And we're anticipating. Jesus glory. This becomes what matters. In our lives. And a priority shift. Leads to a perspective change.

[15:07] You begin to view things differently. And all those things. That I thought were super important. Now pale. In comparison. To following Jesus. And now. When I have to give things up for Christ.

And share in his sufferings. I'm not doing it stoically. To bear it. And just gritting my teeth. And getting through it. I'm doing it joyfully. For the cause of Christ.

And when I give things up on earth. I recognize that they are temporary. Compared to the eternal glory. That I will experience. With Jesus. In eternity.

Paul tells us. In Romans 12. He says. To offer yourselves. As a living sacrifice. And he says. Do not be conformed. To this world.

But be transformed. By the renewing. Of your mind. When I was a little boy. My mom used to bake bread. In our house. And whenever she would get her bed. Bed? Bread.

[16:02] Baking. Things. Out. She would sit down. At the dining room table. And I would go. And I would get my play-doh. And all my little play-doh toys. And while she was kneading the dough.

And working the dough. I would be working my play-doh. And doing the same thing. And I love to do this. And one of my favorite play-doh toys. Was this little. I don't even know what it was called. But it was this little masher machine.

And I would pick out a little shape. And I would put it on the front end of it. And then I would take a big hunk of play-doh. And I would jam it down in there. And then it had this little lever. That I could push.

And I would squeeze this little lever down. And whatever shape I picked. The play-doh would come out in that shape. I was conforming the play-doh. Into the image that I wanted it to be.

In the shape. The world does the same thing to us. All the time. The world is constantly trying to conform us. To become an image of something.

[17:02] That the world wants us to be. We live in a world of offense and outrage. And all the time. We're like the play-doh. Being shoved into the masher machine.

And the world is putting the offense shape. On the front. Or the outrage. Or the whatever shape. On the front of it. And it's squeezing us in all the time.

And it happens so easily. And so naturally. And it's so easy to go along with. You have to fight it. I also played with transformers. And a transformer.

You had a car. And it looked like a car. And it was a car. But if you worked it. And you had to work. It didn't just do it on its own. You had to work. And it was hard.

And it was a lot harder than smashing the play-doh down. But you had to change it. Into something. And it changed. And it became something totally new. And what had been a car. Now was a fighting robot.

[17:58] Or an airplane. Or something else. But you had to work it. Paul is telling us. Don't be conformed to the image of the world. But be transformed. By the renewing of our minds.

Avoid the squeeze. Don't let the world dictate to you. Who you are. And what you are going to say and do. No. Be transformed. By renewing your mind.

Through God. And through scripture. But it's not following. And following Christ as our true gain. Isn't just believing. It's not just this mental ascent.

It's daily surrender. And pursuit. And it's trusting. That this is not just imitation. But participation. We look and we see who Jesus is.

And we're not just saying. Oh well he was a good and moral teacher. And so I should do some of the things that he does. And we're being transformed. And we are beginning to participate. In the work that God is doing in the world.

[18 : 59] Pushing back against the effects of sin. And bringing forth the kingdom of God. In new and radical ways. And following is committing.

It's making sure that no matter where Jesus is going. I'm committed. I'm following. I'm going. Right when I got out of college.

I had the opportunity to go to Germany. And to participate with a group that was going on a Luther Bach tour. And we drove all over Germany. Going to the various sites. That were important in the lives of Luther and Bach.

And it was great. And we ended up as a caravan of three vehicles. A lead vehicle. A middle vehicle. And then my buddy Tom and I were in the last vehicle.

Which was like a 15 passenger van. Tom's driving. I'm sitting shotgun. Now mind you. This is pre-GPS. This is pre-smartphone. This is pre-anything.

[19 : 56] So you're following. And you're committed. Because if you lose the people in front of you. You might as well just start farming in the German countryside. Because you're just not coming home.

Like that's. Just give up. And just go get a job. And sprechen Sie Deutsch. So we're driving. And we're going. And we're entering into a city. And right at the entrance of the city.

There was this railroad crossing. And so. For whatever reason. I'll never know. We're driving. And as the gate starts to come down. The lead car.

Does not do the responsible. Sensible thing. And stop. But they go through. Well. As you can imagine. The bells are clanging.

The thing's coming down. Even more. Well. Well. The second car. Goes through. And so now. We're at the moment of decision. How committed are we. To this following. Of the vehicles.

[20 : 53] Are we ready to learn German. And how to farm. Tom looks at me. And he says. I'm going. And he guns it. And as we go. Over the railroad tracks. I look to my right.

And I stare the conductor. Dead in the eyes. He had blue eyes. And we cross over. We make it. But we were committed.

To following. Committed so much. That I could tell. The color of the eyes. Of the conductor. This is how committed. We should be. To following Jesus.

Are we committed. To say. Even though it doesn't make sense. Even though this seems like. The worst idea ever. I know. Beyond a shadow of a doubt. That Jesus has called me. To do this. And he's leading me here. And I am going.

To do this. Are we that. Committed. To following Christ. As our true. Gain. Recognizing. That if he disappears.

[21 : 51] I would be. Completely lost. Without him. This is committed. Following. Of Jesus. And we commit. Through gathering together.

Right. We come together. On Sundays. To worship. We come together. During the week. To study God's word. With one another. Investing in each other's lives. Learning about the things. And supporting one another.

Through trials. Coming together. We're committed. Through personal times. Of prayer. And Bible study. Knowing that if I'm not. Spending time daily. In God's word.

I'm not being transformed. I'm being conformed. To the world. I'm letting the algorithms. On my social media. Influence me. More than I'm letting. The God of the universe.

Who created. Me. And loves me. And we commit. Through serving those. Around us. To being Jesus. To the community.

[22 : 48] Around us. To the people that God. Has placed. In our midst. In our workplaces. In our neighborhoods. In the places. Where we go to school. Where we play.

And live. And learn. We are Jesus. To those people. Around. And we serve them. Because we are committed. It's a markedly different life.

That Jesus is calling us to. And Paul gives us. An example of that. As he continues on. In Romans 12. He's called us. To become living sacrifices. He's told us. Not to conform.

But to transform. And then he gives us. An example. Of what a transformed life. Looks like. In Romans 12. Starting in verse 9. He says. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil.

And cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another. In love. Honor one another. Above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal. But keep your spiritual fervor.

[23 : 44] Serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope. Patient in affliction. And faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people. Who are in need. And practice hospitality. And then he starts.

To get into my business. A little bit. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who mourn. Rejoice with those who rejoice. And mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud. But be willing to associate. With people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil. For evil. Be careful what is. To do what is right. In the eyes of everyone. If it is possible. As far as it depends on you. Live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge. My dear friends. But leave room for God's wrath. For it is written. It is mine to avenge. I will repay. Says the Lord. On the contrary.

[24 : 42] If your enemy is hungry. Feed him. If he is thirsty. Give him something to drink. In doing this. You will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil. But overcome evil. With good. Romans 12 shows us a life that is marked.

By a transformation. And a life that is participating in the suffering of Jesus. When Jesus was on the cross. He did not lash out at his enemies.

He did not seek revenge on those who had nailed him there. No. He knew. That he was serving a bigger purpose. And so he loved them.

And he forgave them. I am so convicted by this. This is so hard to do. But this is us. Me. Sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

[25 : 43] Loving my enemies. Loving those around us. Sharing in his suffering. Loving those who politically disagree with you.

Who have become the cultural repugnant other. Those whose views you find completely abhorrent. And yet you find a way to love and care for them.

Because they are people created in God's image. No matter how distorted you think their views are. We live in a day and age where this is so hard to do.

But this is the call of Christ. And this is the radical witness of the church. And of the believers and followers of Jesus. That we are following Christ as our true gain.

That all of our political affiliations. All of our other associations and different things that we trust. To find our identity in. And that we find our strength in.

[26 : 43] They are meaningless. When compared to the beauty and the cross and the eternity of Christ. Christ is in you.

And Christ is with you. You can't do this on your own.

It's impossible. It's only through God's power. Through the Holy Spirit working in you. And Christ with you. That you can do this. And this is what Paul is asking us to do.

Paul is asking us to forsake what holds us back. And to follow Christ as our true gain. And so I would ask you this morning. Who are you following in your life?

And where are they leading you? Paul tells us. For sake what holds us back. Follow Christ as our true gain.

[28 : 02] And focus on the goal ahead. Paul says. Not that he's already achieved this. But that he's straining forward. Moving towards the goal.

We're focusing on the goal ahead. Goal ahead. And moving towards an eternity with God. And when we have the right focus. And we have the right vision. We are able to do these difficult things.

And to share in the suffering of Christ. Because we know that what we do here in the present is echoing in eternity. We act in the present with a view towards eternity.

Because if even Paul says he's not arrived. And he's not figured it out. The guy that wrote one third of the New Testament. The guy that did all these incredible things. If he's not figured it out.

I've got no shot. But I want to keep going. And I want to keep trying. And I want to keep moving. And so we continue. And we move forward. And Paul is compelled.

[29 : 04] Not by his identity. Not by his accomplishments. Not by his achievements. Not by his social status. Or what people think about him. No. He's compelled by the prize of Christ.

We get Christ. If you come to Christ and you follow him. There's no guarantee that he's going to fix your marriage. Or that you'll have wonderful children. Or that you'll make lots of money. Or that your job will be great.

Or that everything's going to be perfect. That's not guaranteed for us as followers of Jesus. What is guaranteed is that we get Christ. The greatest, most beautiful thing.

That is so much better than anything else we could ever think of. And Jesus compares it. Right? To a man. Who is searching after precious stones.

And finds the pearl of great price. And he goes and he gives up everything. He sells all that he has. So he can buy this one thing. Or a man is digging in a field.

[30 : 03] And he finds a treasure. And it's so valuable. That he goes and he sells every single thing that he has. So he can buy this field. And get this treasure. We have found the treasure.

That is worth risking everything for. And it is Christ. But it's hard. Because eternity with Christ is in the future.

And we have to focus on the goal ahead. We need to fix our eyes on Christ. Not on all the things that are happening around us. Not on the distractions. When my son hit that home run, the work was done.

The ball went over the fence. All he had to do was finish the job. But he got distracted by all the stuff that was going on around him. By all the things. And all the people. And all the cheering. And all the noise.

All he had to do was finish the job. Brothers and sisters in Christ. The job is done. We will come and celebrate that in just a moment. Jesus has done the work. It's finished.

[31 : 01] He said so. All we have to do is finish the job. But we get distracted all the time. By all the noise. Happening around us. By all the things that are going on.

By everybody telling us who and what we ought to be. When we need to focus on the goal ahead. Where is your focus this morning?

Who are you listening to? Where are you investing your time? Your energy? Your money? What is your focus this morning?

Is your focus on Christ? Paul has challenged us. To renew our focus. Brothers and sisters.

This is a hard word. And yet. God has called us to do that. Forsake the temporary. Follow the Savior. Focus. On eternity.

[31 : 59] God. We thank you. That even in the midst of difficult passages. That challenge and convict us. You are with us. And so we ask now.

That you would empower us. Through the power of your Holy Spirit. Lord. I pray for each one of these people. That you would show each one of us. Where it is. That you want to trim things down. What we need to forsake.

Where we need to follow. And how we need to focus. In Jesus name. Amen.