

Pressing On

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[0:00] But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. So, as those of you who have children, or grandchildren, or even been around children, you can probably guess, my life with a three-year-old little girl is never really a boring thing.

Seriously, the things that those kids say. One day, Elaine was talking to Mia about some of the harsh truths of life, and said, Mia, you know, you win some, you lose some.

Mia responded, mostly you lose some. Kids can be insightful like that, in ways that we don't always expect.

Now, Mia often used to talk about the things she would do when she got bigger. She'd say something like, well, I can't do that now, but I will when I'm bigger.

[1:39] Now, think for a second about where that idea must be coming from in a little one's heart. They're thinking about hope for the future. The difference between what is now and what will be.

The difference between what we are now and what we will be. Isn't that really at the core of what Paul is saying to the Philippians in our passage this morning?

He's writing about where he is and where he will be. He's writing about what he is and what he will be. He's writing, of course, in hope and confidence in the promises of God.

It's not so very different from what Mia was thinking when she said, I can't do that now, but I will when I'm bigger. So we see Paul saying, no, I haven't been fully cleansed of sin yet.

The struggle is real, but I will be. Paul's voice to us this morning is the voice of hope, isn't it?

[2:54] It's our hope, too. Philippians 3 this morning, verse 12, continuing in our Philippians series. We read, Not that I have already obtained this or am perfect, I am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Now there is a lot to unpack in this one verse. As I was preparing for this sermon, I started to realize that I was about to preach a whole sermon on this one verse.

But it's rich. We remember from last week in verse 11, he's talking about attaining the resurrection from the dead. And what he's saying in verse 12 is basically this.

You know, I am not there yet. I still have a frail, fallen body that one day is going to wear out on me. I still struggle with sin.

Well, we know those problems and those struggles, don't we? How many of us just in the past week have been reminded that the bodies we have are going to break and wear out?

[4:12] I know I have. I wake up with joint stiffness. Reminded that this body of mine is a frail thing and that it has an expiration date.

And how many of you just in the past week, how many of us have sinned and realized, hey, I'm not perfect yet. In case you're wondering, I'm certain that you have sinned in the last week.

And I hope it caused you to realize that you're not perfect yet. If that were the end of the story, we're all sinners.

We're all going to die. That might be what biblical scholars might call a major bummer. Real technical term, that. But verse 12 does not end there.

Paul says, But I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. So he presses on in hope, in confidence, trusting that he will be raised from the dead.

[5:24] He will be made perfect. Why? Is it because he's a decent guy and he's trying his best? No! That's not it.

Christ has claimed him as his own. That makes all the difference. Being claimed as Christ's own. Being washed in the blood of Christ. Finding forgiveness in the cross. Being sealed and indwelt and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. He pushes on in confidence because he has the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

And God keeps his promises. He goes on, verses 13 and 14. 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. I press on toward the goal, for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[6:30] Jesus. So he's not perfect yet. But he's pressing on. He's not yet in a perfect, sinless body that will never die.

But he's pressing on. He lives in something of attention, doesn't he? And don't we all as believers in this world live in the reality of the already, but not yet.

But, we have every reason for hope. Every reason to keep pressing on.

As Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4, We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, Our inner self is being renewed day by day.

Our inner self is being renewed day by day. That is what Paul has in mind when he describes pressing on toward the goal.

[7:32] He's talking about walking in the Spirit. He's talking about being sanctified. He's talking about growing in grace and holiness. Talking about committed discipleship to Jesus.

Because Jesus has made us his own. He's not looking back. He's not turning back. And neither should we. Now sometimes, We do find ourselves looking back.

We look back when we stumble into disobedience. We look back when we fall into worldly patterns of thinking. Do you ever do that?

Ever fall back into valuing the things of this world that are passing away over the things of God?

Fall back into putting stuff, putting idols first in your heart, in the place of God. Happens sometimes.

[8:40] When that happens, what are we to do? First, we don't turn back. We don't turn around and start walking back the other direction.

But we also don't stay stuck. We recognize that we have sinned. We confess it. We plead the blood of Jesus, which cleanses us from all unrighteousness. We pray for the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to fill us and change our hearts to love God more deeply.

And we start moving forward again. Not relying on our own strength, but relying on his strength. We move forward. Because we know that what God has for us, the joy that awaits us, is amazing.

It's so much better than the things behind us, the things that we left behind. And it will be worth it no matter what comes. As I thought about this, I was reminded of the Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis.

Do we have any Lewis fans in this crowd? Yeah. Ask the congregation of Anglicans if they like Lewis and see what happens. I thought of my personal favorite book in the series, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, which I feel often gets overlooked and underappreciated.

[10:04] But I'm not going to grind my axe about that this winter. Now, in that story, one of my favorite characters, the chivalrous sword-fighting little mouse Reapachieve, is determined to sail to the eastern end of the world because he believes that Aslan's country is found there.

Now, I suspect for most of you I don't need to say this because you're a congregation of Anglicans, but Aslan, for those who don't know the series, serves basically as an allegorical representation of Christ in the Chronicles of Narnia.

He's the king, he's a lion, he's good, but he's not safe. Sounds like Jesus. But Reapachieve is determined to get to Aslan's country.

Now, in the beginning of the book, the little mouse reveals that in the cradle, he had heard a verse about Aslan's country in the east, heard that he would find all that he seeks there.

And he says that the spell of that has been on him all his life. So getting there becomes his all-consuming passion.

[11:21] He later says, My own plans are made. While I can, I sail east in the dawn-treader. When she fails me, I paddle east in my coracle.

When she sinks, I shall swim east with my four paws. And when I can swim no longer, if I have not reached Aslan's country or shot over the edge of the world into some vast cataract, I shall sink with my nose to the sunrise.

I have to love Lewis. But isn't that a helpful illustration of what Paul is talking about? Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. No matter what, we keep pressing toward the goal.

It's there. It's real. It's worth it. Paul drives it home in verse 15. Let those of us who are mature think this way.

[12 : 32] And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. He's not mincing words here. He could probably drop his mic and walk away at this point.

Think about for a second how it might go over if you tried quoting this verse the next time you have a disagreement with someone. Well, let those of us who are mature think this way.

And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. You guys mind if I use that line? In all seriousness, though, looking forward to the call and the promise of God is the sign of Christian maturity.

Now, we are probably not as mature as we'd like to be yet. Paul wasn't. He admits that. I'm not. Probably, if you're anything like me, you're not either.

But, the Holy Spirit is at work in us, getting us there. As we grow in the Christian life, we will find that we look forward more and backward less.

[13 : 49] In the meantime, we cannot turn back. As Paul says in verse 16, only let us hold true to what we have attained.

But we're not alone in this journey. Along with the Holy Spirit, we have the example of other believers, some who have gone on before us into eternal life.

We have the support of believers who are further along and more mature in the faith than we are. Paul reminds his hearers of that in verse 17. Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Think about the example of believers who have influenced me, some of whom have already gone on to their heavenly reward.

Think, for example, of my grandmother, Dolores. Now, I was like the little mouse reaperchief in Lewis' story in the sense that from the time I was in the cradle, I had people, I had the blessing of people telling me where I would find all that I seek or desire, in the Lord Jesus and in heaven.

[15 : 12] My grandmother talked to me about that even when I was a little guy. I don't remember a time when she wasn't talking to me about that. Her love for the Lord was really, truly the very center of her heart and life, the very center of her being.

And she was simply one of the most compassionate, loving people I have ever met. Seriously, if death by snuggles could happen, I would not have survived childhood.

Thanks to my grandmother. I can honestly say about her, I can say about her life, that she really did look forward.

She pressed forward with a determination that was extraordinary. Extraordinary. I remember her. I remember her witness. I remember her love for the Lord and for other people and her determination to press on toward the goal.

I remember and I strive to imitate what I was so blessed to witness in her life. Just a quick word for the grandparents in the congregation.

[16 : 26] That could be you. But have you known someone like that? I think most of us have.

When you need encouragement, when things are tough, when you are tempted to look back, remember them. Seriously. Now if they happen to be someone who is still with us on this side of eternity, talk to them.

Share your struggles with them. Seek their wisdom. The Christian life is not something we can do alone. But we know that it can be done by the grace of God.

Because we have known people who have done it, don't we? On the other hand, there are examples that we do not want to follow. We see in verses 18 and 19. For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things. and the Bible tells us that the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.

[17 : 48] But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. To walk as an enemy of the cross and the enemy of the gospel is to walk a road that leads to destruction.

those who are perishing. What does that look like? They glory in their shame instead of glorying in Jesus Christ.

They worship themselves and their desires instead of worshiping and serving the true and living God and that leads to ruin. Brothers and sisters in Christ, that is where we were before the Lord

saved us.

That's where we would still be stuck apart from His grace to us in Christ Jesus. We cannot, we must not walk that way anymore because Christ Jesus has made us His own.

That's not who we are anymore. We look forward to what God has for us and not at the mess that we used to be stuck in. We look forward to heaven where our citizenship is, our eternal citizenship, and not back at the things that are passing away.

[19 : 11] As Paul says verses 20 and 21, our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.

From heaven where our citizenship is we await a Savior, brothers and sisters. He will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body.

we wait in hope. We are not yet perfected, but we will be. Why? Because Jesus is coming. Our bodies are not yet transformed, not yet glorified, not yet like our Savior's glorious body, but they will be because Jesus is coming.

We may not yet have made it our own, but it will be our own because Jesus is coming and He has made us His own. How do we know for sure that these things will be?

Because His power, the very power that enables Him to subject all things to Himself guarantees it. And that is an unstoppable power.

[20 : 39] power. Jesus is risen. All things are subjected to Him. He has made us His own, and His victory is our victory.

So we press on in hope, in joy, in expectation, because we know that where we are headed is worth the journey.

to God alone be the glory now and forever. Amen.