

Determinations for the Coming Year

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[0 : 00] I would like you to turn in your Bibles this morning to Philippians chapter 3 and before we open the text together.

All right, that's something I want to work at and I'm going to be conscious and deliberate in doing so. So here's my appeal to do. At least when we're singing.

Now I understand some of us are linear and some of us are global. You know, some of us are all over the place. And some of us are pretty tracky. You know, it's like one thing after another. So I'm asking you to do something that may be stretching things a little bit.

But when we are singing, would you mind cross-referencing the things we're singing about with Scripture? Does that make sense?

Hey, listen to me. Isaiah chapter 8 verse 20 says this. To the law and to the prophecies or the testimonies, if it speaks not according to this, there is no light in them.

[1 : 23] In other words, the benchmark of truth is really the Bible. And I am so appreciative of the fact that when we gather to sing, that those who minister to us and encourage us in singing are very conscious and deliberate about taking the passage that we are going to study.

And finally, John gets this most of the time in advance, quite a bit in advance, about a week or so. And he has time to kind of ponder this. And then the songs reference back to the text.

And so my plea is this. This is on your 15 to-do list, right? You got that? And I'll try not to nag too often about this, but at least bump your wife and say, hey, what passage?

Do that, okay? Or nudge your children and say, what passage? Or do you understand what I'm saying? Here's my plea. Listen.

Everybody look up. Smile. Please. Seriously. I want us to learn to be conscious and deliberate in thinking scripturally. And probably one of the easier places to exercise is when we are singing.

[2 : 47] So you say, all right, Holy Spirit, bring to mind passages that I need. Am I the only one getting hot in here? I see lots of people fanning. And I am very tempted to take off my sweater.

That's a threat. But anyway, okay. All right. Here we go. Philippians chapter 3. Let me read the passage to you. Beginning there in verse 8.

Indeed, I count everything as lost because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for his sake. I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order 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 comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Now here's verse 10 that I want us to focus on this morning, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and I may share in his suffering, becoming like him in his death.

Will you pray with me and pray for me? Holy Father, for us to take this passage in mind and hand this morning is to do something that is important and we trust is enabled by the Spirit of God.

[4 : 21] Lord, we are often guilty of hearing and not applying. We're often guilty of allowing time that should be spent profitably, focusing on things that are of Christ's preeminence and glory, and squandering that time in thinking of things that are of no eternal value and purpose.

And so we would ask humbly this morning that your Spirit would enable me as I preach, that I might do so in such a fashion that it is evident that it is the work of God that is playing out in real time in the teaching and the preaching of the Word, but also, Lord, that it is received with the help of the Spirit that it might bear fruit in the lives of those who know the Lord Jesus Christ, and it might be used by your Spirit to draw those who are here today that do not know the Lord Jesus to the cross and to salvation.

And so, Lord, as I preach, I'm committed to bathe this message in prayer, and as I preach, I trust your people will pray that we might rejoice together and seeing you at work in our fellowship and in our lives individually this morning.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. As we take up this passage, I really look at verse 10 as being one of those focal passages that helps us in our journey.

And I think about the year that lies in front of us, and I would imagine that there are some of you that have consciously and deliberately made some decisions about things that you're going to work on this year.

[6 : 04] Now, you may be on the other side of Christmas, and you're thinking to yourself, well, okay, Christmas and New Year has come and passed, and I need to do something about the fact that I have overindulged myself a little bit.

I don't want you to raise your hand and give yourself away, but you understand that. There are some of you who might be saying, well, okay, last year was a bust in such and such an area, and this year I'm going to be conscious and deliberate, and this is what I'm going to work on.

I'm just curious, how many of you have a plan to read through the Bible this year? Raise your hand and wave at me. Get it up above the elbow like this. Okay, you're going to read through the Bible.

How many of you are thinking about it and might be a good idea, but you haven't decided yet? Raise your hand. Let's try that again. It was a real soft question. Are you alive?

Are you thinking about it maybe? And it might be a good idea. Thank you. I like seeing that hand. Okay, that's a goal. That's one that's worthy of your consideration.

[7 : 05] You may have others that you've thought about and decided, man, this is what I'm going to focus on, God being my help, and as a result of that focus, it's going to make a difference. How many of you have ever gone to the store and didn't make a list and then come back and decided you needed to go again?

You ever done that? Well, with life, you don't get a do-over. It kind of whittles out behind you, and if you haven't planned and thought about it intentionally, the outcome often is a level of disappointment as you look back across the path and say, man, I should have.

I wish. I could have done better. And so my appeal, my plea for you this morning is that you who are believers would consciously and deliberately make some objective decisions and mark them down and keep those in front of you in the coming year.

And I can tell you this, it'll make a difference. What we're looking at in this passage, actually, in Philippians chapter 3, is the apostle kind of pushing together his life objectives and goals, and he's separating out all the chaff and setting aside those things that are of no importance to him and zeroing down on those things that were at the very center of his life.

And it is from that core that I want to encourage you this morning to take the pattern of the apostle and make it true for your life. So let's look here at the things that really governed the apostle's life as he kind of ground on through life.

[8 : 38] Look at the passage in verse 10. It says, that I may know him. And so let's take this simple statement up and just kind of ponder what Paul means because we understand, for one thing, that Paul's background was very, very significant in understanding all about the Old Testament.

He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was a well-trained Jew. He had sat at Gamaliel's feet, and without question, if you had asked him about any of the Old Testament passages that had reference to the Messiah, he probably could have spoken on them and referred to them and understood the relationship that those passages had to the hope of Israel.

But nevertheless, he'd never come to a personal relationship with Christ until on the road to Damascus. Do you remember what happened? Christ revealed himself to him.

Christ drew him to salvation, and Paul's life was radically changed. Where at one time, he had been a persecutor of believers. He became one of the preeminent spokespersons for the gospel and the one that God used in a very particular way to bring the gospel to the Gentiles.

That's who we are. Paul was a phenomenal instrument in the hands of God. And so as you hear him say this this morning, you understand that when Paul says, that I might know him, he's not speaking just about that academic information that he gathered at one time.

[10 : 13] And there are some of you sitting here that maybe grew up in a Christian home. You heard the Bible stories. You know about who Jesus is. You know that he was born in a manger in a stable.

You know that he was born of a virgin. But all that information is just kind of academic and kind of abstract. It doesn't really have a personal connection to you. When Paul makes that statement that I might know him, he's talking about having more than a head knowledge about who Christ is.

He's talking about having a personal, genuine relationship that is governed by the reality of who that person is. I don't want to overplay the importance of the word, but when Paul speaks about knowing here, he's talking about that kind of knowledge that is something that is personal and experiential in nature.

In other words, I understand by virtue of what I've gone through and experienced. So in relationship to this business of knowing Christ, let me draw out several truths that I want you to think about this morning.

For one, our knowledge of Christ can be deepened. Our knowledge of Christ can be deepened. And I want to assure you that a deepening relationship and understanding of the person of Christ will make a significant difference in the life of the believer.

[11 : 36] You see, the things that we care about and the things we invest our energy in end up having a profound influence on who we are and how we go about life. Go back just a little bit.

We're in verse 10. So go back to verse 8. And here's Paul saying, Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss so that I may have a growing understanding of the person of Christ.

It's amazing when you stop and think about this. Paul was saying that all the other things in my life are of relative insignificance in comparison to the importance of knowing the Lord Jesus.

Now, it's easy for us to hear that said, but let's kind of play it out in real time. So there you are. You get up in the morning and you have all good intentions of spending some time with the Lord, right?

I mean, after all, Christians, we know that. That's important. But there you go. You grab your iPad and before you actually have time with the Lord and time with the Word, guess where you go?

[12:46] Not to Facebook. You wouldn't do that because Jesus is first. And you don't go to MSN or CBS or whatever else the news feed is. You don't even check the weather.

You go right to the book, right? And all God's people say, yes, that's me. I'm there. It's the book that I want because I want to know Jesus more than the weather or what somebody posted, right?

Paul says this. Listen, look at the passage. He says, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

And so as you think about this business, we recognize that our knowledge of Christ can be deepened and that the knowledge of Christ being deepened comes about from a conscious and deliberate choice on our part, in our heart to put Him in that position of preeminence.

I want you to understand, secondly, that our knowledge of Christ can be deepened by pursuing time with Him and obedience. By pursuing time with Him and obedience.

[14:02] Let me give you several things in relationship to this. Number one, if you're going to grow in knowing Christ, there must be a willingness to hear. Be humble to hear. It's very interesting when you stop and think about this business of picking up information about who the Lord Jesus actually is.

It doesn't come by osmosis. Does anybody know what osmosis is? It's the transfer of something from a place of lesser density or how does that go?

Help me here. Mark, spare me. From greater density to lesser density. There we go. Thank you. A PhD can help me anytime. So here we go. Osmosis is not how we gain information about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Laying your pillow on top of the Bible and sleeping with the Bible there doesn't mean it's going to kind of work its way up into your brain and you're going to become more deeply affectionate with the Lord Jesus Christ.

There has to be a willingness to hear who He is and that takes time. That takes time. It's very interesting when you stop and think about the issue of how we grow in knowing who God is and knowing about the Lord Jesus Christ that we recognize we are dependent upon revelation.

[15:13] We're dependent upon Him telling us. I think for a moment about the story of Job and in Job you have a man who was a good guy. He was an upright man and eschewed evil.

You kind of look up the word eschewed. It means he kind of avoided it. He was into not doing all the bad things. But you know what? Job's understanding of God was kind of not where it needed to be and God allowed Job to go through all kinds of what?

Heartache and difficulty. Chapter 38 through 42. Every one of those chapters is God coming to Job and saying by the way Job it's time for you to listen up because Job was a little full of himself and why am I suffering these things and what's going on and why are you doing this to me?

By the way did God ever answer Job's questions about why he was suffering? No. All God did in those chapters essentially was give Job a picture of God's great wisdom in particular in relationship to creation.

Are there any other illustrations of God's wisdom and power besides creation? The answer is you bet. In those chapters we find Job first saying you know it's time for me to be quiet but then at the end of God's recitation of who he is in relationship to creation here's what Job says I have heard of you by the hearing of my ear.

[16:46] In other words there are some things I knew about you I'd heard but now my eye sees you. In other words I've gained further understanding and further insight into who you are.

And so I would appeal to you this morning as you kind of look into the future to say to yourself one of the deliberate intentions of my life this year is going to be I by God's grace am going to grow in knowing Christ.

That's my goal. That's my goal. I want you to understand also that we grow by being humble to obey. John chapter 15 verse 10 let's look at that just for a moment keep your finger there in Philippians but I want you to go back to John chapter 15 if you keep my commandments you will abide in my love just as I've kept my father's commandments and abide in his love.

If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love. You know one of the things that I kind of am flummoxed a little bit by today is I look at the general spiritual poverty of many many people in America.

I was reading a Facebook post by an individual who at one time quite an effective speaker pastor pastor and the guy has drifted far away from the Lord and as I was as I was paying attention I don't know where his heart is for sure but as I read his recurring posts it seems that so much of the truth has been lost and just kind of laid aside and I thought what is behind all this?

[18:45] Well for one thing in order to grow in understanding who Christ is there must be a willingness to follow his instruction. Do you understand that? How many of you remember learning the multiplication tables and the addition tables?

I mean it was just drudgery. Do you remember that? Flash cards. How many of you did flash cards besides me? Flash card hands up. Okay. Whoa! Real crowd here.

I mean I got it. Okay put them down. Put them down. You know do you remember the dull business of two plus two equals what? Four. I mean yeah we've got it. But there were times when we kind of floundered with that basic information and some of us actually thought to ourselves why do I need to do this?

Some of us stayed in that state of why do I need to do this and then when we got on to a little more complex problems like you know N and P over blah blah you know it's way beyond me.

I rely on others to help me with that kind of detail. But you know eventually we got caught out because we weren't willing to follow the line. Beloved I want you to understand this obedience is the key that unlocks the door of understanding.

[20:02] And if you're sitting here this morning and you're saying well listen I want to know more about Christ here's what I can tell you is going to happen. Listen to me carefully. You are in your journey of learning who Christ is going to have him speak to you and say hey it's time to stop doing this and it's time to start doing that.

And when you say no to him guess what's going to happen? His voice gets softer and his voice gets repetitious. How many of you understand what I mean by repetitious?

You know if you're not willing to obey him on point A he's not going to move on to point B and say well let point A go. He's going to keep on coming back to it. And so if you want to grow in understanding Christ there must be a willingness to hear and there must be a willingness to obey.

I want to make one other point before we leave this here. Knowing him must come first. Make no mistake about it going back there to Philippians chapter 3 we understand that Paul is laying out things here in a sense in a sequence that has some importance.

I want you to know that Bible behavior and Bible obedience are important. But the contemporary pattern of providing instruction in certain behaviors without helping people understand the underlying issue of our relationship with Christ is ultimately pretty bankrupt and ineffective.

[21 : 26] Let me explain it this way. It is not an accident that Paul in Ephesians spends three chapters helping you and helping me understand the wonder of our relationship with Christ before he talks at all about the way in which we relate with one another.

You see a husband who has not come to grips with the beauty of his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and is not influenced by his growing affection for Christ can never really love his bride much more than he loves the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you understand that? And so a reasonable wife who would like her husband to love her more, guess what she should be doing? She should be quietly encouraging his spiritual growth and doing everything she can in prayer to help him grow to be the man that God needs him to be because what?

His love for her rests upon the foundation and the bedrock of his love for him. And to teach Ephesians 5 without teaching Ephesians 1, 2, 3 is to lay a very shallow and shaky moral bedrock.

Let me have you look at another illustration of this and turn over in your Bible. We're talking here in 1 Thessalonians about the matter of moral purity. Moral purity is an ongoing battle in our culture today.

[22 : 52] Everywhere you turn you see the evidence of it. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 3. For this is the will of God, your sanctification.

Boy, that sounds pretty good in the abstract. God's interest is that I grow to be more godly, more pure. And then Paul immediately cuts to the practical application. He says that you abstain from sexual immorality.

All kinds. God has made the sexual communion of a husband and wife as a blessing in marriage.

Outside of that, we are to abstain and to wait for God to be the one that provides the life partner for us. And so here is Paul writing to a church in a pagan culture. He says, hey, don't be doing what the rest of the unsaved pagan world is engaged in.

And then he lays out for them. He comes down there in verse 5. He says, your behavior is not to be like the lust of the Gentiles.

[23 : 57] And what's the problem that the Gentiles have? Everybody smile. Listen. It's not that they don't know the rules. It's that they don't know God. Do you understand that?

It's not that they don't know the rules. It's that they don't know God. The underlying problem with their moral behavior is that it is a reflection of the relationship or the absence of a relationship with the God of this universe.

That's the reason that when Joseph was tempted by Potiphar's wife back in the book of Genesis, that when Joseph ultimately responded to that temptation, he said, how can I do this great thing against God?

And so I want you to understand this morning as you think about the matter in Philippians of goal for this year, number one, my personal goal is I want to grow in knowing Christ.

Knowing Christ. That's my goal. Write it down. Make it clear. Consciously and deliberately make that determination. And if you want to go out on a limb, say it to somebody else.

[25 : 04] Now what's the danger of telling somebody else that that's your goal? What's the danger? Accountability, but not only that, but sometimes when you're drifting left of center, they're going to remind you of that.

Am I correct? So there you are being a little surly. How many of you understand what I mean by surly? Grumpy, sarcastic. Don't ever tell me. Don't ever tell me that sarcasm is your love language.

That's a lie from hell. That's not Bible truth. And so there you are. You're being a little sarcastic, a little grumpy. And the person that you asked to pray for you about growing in your love for Christ says, hey, you're not doing very well today.

How's that? So I encourage you. Go ahead. Write it down somewhere personally. But then step out on a limb and say to someone close to you that has teeth.

You know what I mean by teeth? Posting it on Facebook is not the same as telling your husband, hey, I want you to pray for me that I grow in loving Christ. And here, here's the deal.

[26 : 11] And as this year progresses, I want you to let me know whether you see any signs of it. Let's go to the second one. Paul says that I may know him and the power of his resurrection.

resurrection, the power of his resurrection. Now ask yourself the question, why is knowing his resurrection power important? Well, there's a reason that Paul puts it here in relationship to this matter of spiritual growth.

I'm going to mention in broad terms several of the things that the resurrection has value to the believer in regards to, but then I'll come down and focus on one particular thing, namely that of our progressive sanctification and growing to be more like Christ over time.

I do want you to understand that his resurrection is proof that his substitutionary death, he died in my place. How do I know that his death satisfied the righteous judgment of a holy God against my sin?

His resurrection proves it. I have confidence that Jesus has paid my penalty and that that debt is satisfied because Christ rose from the dead.

[27 : 22] There's another thing that the resurrection provides to me as a believer. It provides to me great assurance of my own resurrection. Earlier this month, I was at the graveside with my family where we laid my father's body to rest, waiting for the day of the resurrection.

And I can tell you this without any hesitation, I have confidence in the day that I will see the Lord Jesus Christ and I will also see my father face to face. Why? Because Jesus rose from the dead, I have confidence in the resurrection.

But I want you to understand that the primary focus that Paul has this morning is on the matter of the resurrection's power being available for me in progressive sanctification or growing to be more like Christ.

Turn back in your Bible, you're in the book of Philippians, turn back to Ephesians chapter 1 verse 19. Ephesians chapter 1 verse 19. One of two primary prayers that the apostle prays in Ephesians.

And taking from verse 19, here is the apostle saying this. He says, let me kind of pick it up. He says there in verse 16, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, knowing Christ.

[28 : 49] Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might.

In other words, hey listen, Paul's saying, I want you to get your hands around how wonderful the blessing of God is in relationship to the work that God is doing in you.

Well, what power is available to help me grow to be different? Here's the truth. There's not a one of us that when we look privately in the mirror of our own soul, do not end up with a sense of, man, there are things that need to be changed.

Would you agree with that? Yeah, I'm not where I need to be. I need to grow in grace. I need to grow to be more like Christ. How will that growth come about? Well, Paul argues here.

He says you need to understand that the power that is available to help you change is the resurrection power that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. I want to encourage you with that.

[30 : 04] So you think this morning about the fact that here you are, you're a person who is struggling with the reality of some pervasive sin in your life. Secret, nobody else knows about it maybe, but you're sitting there, man, how can I change?

You can change through the power of the cross and the resurrection. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to raise you up in newness of life, in salvation, but also to begin the process of helping you grow in grace.

So here's the blessed fact that I am completely confident in. We who know Christ are not doomed to stay slaves to our pasts.

Can I say that slowly so you don't forget it? We who are in Christ Jesus are not doomed to stay slaves to our past.

Contemporary psychology indicates that people cannot escape their past. The fact of the matter is, is that if a man is in Christ Jesus, he is a what?

[31 : 06] He is somebody different. And not only is he somebody different, but he also has the power of the Spirit of God, better yet, slap my mouth, it's not just the power of the Spirit of God, it's the Spirit of God.

Do you got that? It's better than just the power. It's the person of the Spirit of God in me. And why is he there? Does anybody know? Well, there are a number of things, but one of the reasons he's there is to help me change.

I like that. And so this morning, as you stop and think about who wrote this letter, you stop and recognize that the man who writes this there in Philippians was at one time an incredibly arrogant and murderous individual.

Individual, not individuals. He was a persecutor of the church. He was full of himself. And he came by the grace of God to realize the bankruptcy of his own soul.

And he was drawn to the cross. And his life continued to grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. If that power was available for Paul to change him from Saul to becoming Paul, is that power available for you this morning?

[32 : 19] And the answer is yes. Yes. And so I want you to recognize that to know that power, to know that power, is to trust him to help you change and then see the change taking place in time.

One of the advantages of getting older in the faith, now here's the truth, growing in grace is a little, it's like a roller coaster ride a little bit with an uphill journey.

A roller coaster ride goes how? Up, down, up, down, up, down, down, down, right? Do you follow me? I mean, they're relying on gravity to take you where? Down.

Progressive sanctification is relying on grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to take you where? Up. And if you kind of look and chart your life, you would see that there are ups and downs in the journey.

How many of you realize that? There are ups and downs in the journey. Do I wish it was straight uphill? Bang. Yes. Is it? No. But you know what?

[33 : 22] One of the privileges of being a 66 is I can see where the dots on the chart are going in the right direction and he gets the credit for it. I love the blessing of being able to say to people who are caught in their sins, I've got good news for you.

Jesus can save you and give you complete forgiveness for all of your sins. And not only that, you don't have to stay the way you are. You don't have to stay the way you are. That brings me to a third thing that we find there in the passage in Philippians.

Mark what it says, and may share his sufferings becoming like him in death. Let me take a moment and back up and have the larger picture here.

Here is Paul praying. Number one, he prayed for an intimate knowledge of Christ. He prayed for an understanding of the divine power that's available to help him grow.

But then he comes to this business also of the matter of suffering. To what end? I want you to understand that the believer is called to be a living sacrifice worthy of his high calling.

[34 : 34] And so here's Paul who says, Hey, listen, I want to grow in knowing Christ. I want to grow in seeing the power of the resurrection work in my life. And I want to grow to the point that suffering and challenge and hardship is not something to be avoided, but it's something to be received for the sake of the kingdom and for the sake of Christ.

You see, when we share in his suffering, we become like him. We grow through that. And I want you to understand that the one who was writing this, Paul, was someone who suffered deeply.

When he wrote the epistle to the church at Philippi, he was writing it in prison. And there is not a single note in this entire epistle of Paul kind of commiserating about how hard and how difficult his journey was.

By the way, does anybody know how Paul's last lap in life played out? 2 Timothy, we find the apostle largely abandoned by the entire church that he had ministered to and raised up through the grace of God.

Most of them had turned their backs on Paul. And yet Paul here in the midst of all that hardship and suffering, he says, Man, I am ready to be offered up.

[35 : 53] I've run my race. I've kept the faith. And I'm looking forward to the day I'm going to see Christ. Why? Why? Because he understood who he was following and who he was serving.

And he understood the value of the hardship and difficulty that he faced in life. Paul's suffering for Christ and for the gospel was a blessing to be desired rather than a pain to be avoided.

So I want you to think with me just for a moment about what it means to suffer with Christ. Christ suffered in loving people that had no time for his love or his salvation. Do you ever find yourself small group leader, deacon, Sunday school teacher, youth leader?

You find yourself investing in the lives of kids and lives of other people and you find yourself frustrated by the fact that they don't even seem to appreciate what you're putting into it.

You are suffering in place of Christ and for him. Jesus also suffered with intentional rejection by those who most desperately needed him.

[37 : 00] Stop and think about that. Jesus suffered at the hands of those who most desperately needed him. One of the things that goes with ministry, whatever role you have and whatever place you have, you're going to find yourself investing repeatedly in individuals who desperately need the work of Christ in their life.

And as you pour the ministry of the gospel into their lives, sometimes they're going to say, Hey, no, thank you. In fact, it's going to go worse than that. They're going to say, Leave me alone. I want you to understand that Christ suffered because what he did was he revealed the light of man's heart or the real depravity of man's heart.

And when he turned on the light, those who didn't like the light, guess what they did? They hated him. They hated him. I can think back to this last year and several of the incidents. Most of you know that I am not a frequent poster on Facebook.

It's a rare situation that leads me to post something on Facebook. There's so much blather out there that I don't engage in it, but I do read a lot of it.

And every now and then something will light me up to the point I say, You know, I think about this and I craft it over a period of days and finally put something out there. I can tell you some of the most scathing things I've ever had said to me have been said by people on Facebook in regards to things that I've said that were sweet and simple gospel truths.

[38 : 28] Understand this. You're going to suffer for representing Christ faithfully. I want you to recognize this morning that Paul here says, I want to know him.

I want to know his power. And I want to know the fellowship of suffering along with him in the ministry of the gospel. Is that your desire for this year? Think with me.

I want to grow in knowing Christ. I can do that. But the practical part, I want to grow in understanding Christ's power to help me change.

I need to be someone different than I am. I can do that. I need to grow to be one who sees suffering not as something to be avoided, but something to be joyfully received, because when I am suffering for the testimony of Christ and the glory of his gospel, I am suffering according to the will of God.

I want to be there. I want to be there. So this Sunday, as we think of our first Sunday together, I want to challenge you.

[39 : 43] Consciously and deliberately, without emotional fanfare, and with the brutal reality of the scriptures, which speaks authoritatively into the life of a believer.

Do you understand what I just said? God's word has a right to tell you how to live and how to think. On the basis of the authority of the scripture, I encourage you to consciously and deliberately say, Philippians chapter 3 verse 10, or one such verse like that will determine the year in front of me.

And if you have the intestinal fortitude and a deliberate intention to be a person who grows in grace, write it down.

Tell someone with teeth and ask them to help you track the work of grace in your life this year.

Let's close in prayer. Our Father God, this morning, as we think in particular of believers, of the blessing we have in our salvation, we understand that you have delivered us out of darkness into marvelous light.

[40 : 57] And you have set the year in front of us and called us through your spirit and through the authority of your word of God to be a people that are conscious and deliberate in pursuing a growing relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and an understanding that we can count upon your power to help us change and a willingness to be sacrificial in servanthood.

I pray, Lord, for your people this morning that as we have heard your word, that your spirit would take and chisel it firmly into the heart. that, Lord, in the year to come, it might be evident that we individually and we as a body of believers are growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And unbelievers watching us ask us a reason for the hope. Believers who are struggling are encouraged by the evidence of progressive sanctification in our heart.

and we rejoice in seeing your power at work. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. As John comes to lead us in our closing song, let me encourage you to stand, if you would, please.