

"The Supremacy of Knowing Christ" Philippians 3:1-14

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Date: 08 June 2025

Preacher: Rev. Daniel Avitan

[0 : 00] Lord, we ask for your blessing. Lord, we pray that you would meet us where we are at, exactly where we are at. Lord, your word is a blessing to us, and it's a blessing in different ways at different times.

We've all come from different weeks, so Lord, whether this, your word will be an encouragement to us this morning, will be a conviction to us, will exhort us, will comfort us, whatever it may be, maybe all of those things. Lord, would you do it, and do it by your spirit.

Lord, we thank you for this day where we remember the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us. Lord, let us trust that you are active amongst us, even now. We pray this in Christ's name.

Amen. If you have one of these, turn with me. Page 14 will be on 14 and a little bit of page 16.

Before we jump into God's word, a bit of an introduction. So during World War II, there was a wealthy Serbian man who was a spy for German intelligence, a man named Dusko Popov. He hated the Nazis. So what does a Nazi spy do? One that hates the Nazis, he goes to MI6 and offers his service to the British. And he becomes one of the most valued spies for the Allied forces. In the late summer of 1941, MI6 sends him to New York. He has some very valuable information and he meets with J. Edgar Hoover himself, the head of the FBI, a very, very famous, maybe infamous figure in American history, meets with J. Edgar Hoover and shares with him some key intelligence saying that there would be a likely attack by the Japanese on Pearl

Harbor. Someplace, well, it wasn't so much Pearl Harbor as it was in Hawaii on the naval base, so maybe it was Pearl Harbor. For whatever reason, whether J. Edgar Hoover decided not to pass it along or he did pass it along and it got nixed, that information was not acted upon. That warning was not heeded. And five months later, Imperial Japan made a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the American fleet there, and just over 2,400 souls perished.

Warnings are valuable things. They're valuable things to consider, particularly when they come from a trusted and reliable source. However, I mean, we often struggle with warnings, and for a variety of reasons. They tend to create more anxiety than they do alleviate anxiety. Even when we recognize that following a warning would be beneficial, we are hesitant to heed the warning, to deviate from our status quo. And we do it, again, for all sorts of different reasons. And when we ignore such a warning that turns out to be true, is this not the source of great regret?

[3 : 22] A lot of frustration. So a couple thoughts. Why do we struggle with warnings? The first, put just very practically, in our day, we are very oversaturated with warnings and polemical discourse.

Social media, both the source and the means by which such warnings and polemics are amplified, it's just, it's a non-stop 24-hour news cycle.

Social media, all sorts of media, just kind of washing over us. Warnings, watch out for this, don't do this, avoid these plastics, avoid these foods, avoid these people, avoid these politics, and it continues on and on and on.

And so, we can become inoculated with such warnings. But the second reason, and I'm sure there's more than just two, but I'll just offer a couple. The second reason, I think, is a much deeper human problem, why we don't heed warnings.

Warnings cause confrontation. And confrontation can be very uncomfortable, for it disrupts the way we live, and oftentimes our comfort.

[4 : 34] We are told we are doing something wrong, or what we are doing will lead to some kind of danger or pain or discomfort. We think changing could be even more uncomfortable than if we just kept things the way they are.

We know that behavior and habits, certain ones that do not lead to flourishing, need to be stopped. Reform needs to happen in our lives.

But change is costly, and change is scary. And we can be all too excellent at convincing ourselves that the source of these warnings, they're not to be believed.

In the same way that Hoover, for whatever reason, seemed to disbelieve this Dushko Popov. But there's a place for warnings and polemics.

It's a huge part, actually, of the Christian faith. From the very beginning, we'll see this in our text, but if you go through the Gospels, if you go through the Acts of the Apostles, there is a bombardment of false teachings and pushback against the Christian faith, and against Jesus as the Messiah, and against this picture of what human flourishing ought to be.

[6 : 00] And it constantly needs to get battled and pushed back. There has to be an offensive and a defensive with the Christian faith. Heresy has existed all throughout Christian history.

It continues to exist to this day. The Apostle Paul, we come to our text now, the Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippian church in prison, himself put in prison in a very unjust way.

A lot of leaders that saw Paul as a threat threw him in jail or created the environment for him to be imprisoned.

And he is writing to this church he loves in Philippi, in Macedonia, present-day Macedonia. And his desire is to see them flourish. And if you haven't been following along, or if you just need a bit of a refresher, because we haven't been in Philippians for a couple weeks, the letter is a joyful one where Paul is really holding up the life of Christ as the exemplary life to follow.

He loves these people. He wants them to grow in their maturity. And now he gets to a section where he is actually going on the defensive, so to speak, and defending the faith and issuing warnings for the church to not just hear, but to act upon.

[7 : 23] So we'll break up our text into three sections. We'll look at a warning, we'll look at a reflection, and we'll look at a call. So we'll jump right in the text. We'll start in verse one. And we'll continue on from there.

This is what it says. Finally, my brothers, it's a bit of a catch-all term for brothers and sisters. It's a term of affection for a group of people. Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

To write the same things to you is no trouble to me, and is safe for you. I'll stop there before we continue on. Paul does not immediately begin with warnings.

Instead, he offers this affectionate reminder to the church to find joy in Christ. The letter of the Philippians is called the joy-filled letter, or the letter of joy, or the epistle of joy.

And we see once again Paul making reference to the importance of joy within the Christian life, and specifically, the joy that is found in Christ.

[8 : 23] And I think he is reminding the people of this because such joy in Christ can easily fade away in the face of such difficulties, especially some of the difficulties that we're going to see in the next few verses.

Rejoicing in the Lord. A reminder. And I think it's important for us to remember as well that Paul is reminding the people to have joy in the Lord because joy is less of this feeling that we have and more of a practice that we need to foster in our own lives.

It is a choice oftentimes to embrace joy, which seems like, you know, willing ourselves to have a feeling seems a bit counterintuitive.

It will make sense as we continue on, but Paul is really imploring these people, these Philippian men and women, to practice having joy in Christ, to embrace it, to fashion their life around it, to turn towards Christ himself.

In fact, he'll continue on, again, this idea of joy that's marbled throughout Philippians and especially our section. It is a reminder that joy in Christ isn't just a disposition of the heart, but it's actually the means and source of stability for the entire Christian life.

[9 : 47] So with that as a bit of an intro that Paul reminds his, a reminder rather, that Paul reminds the church, he gets right into the warnings, verses two and three.

Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Three warnings about three types of false teachers. Now, they could represent three distinct groups or just one collective group. The reality is, the text, Paul's a bit ambiguous.

He is not specifying who these people are. They could be, again, three different groups. They could be a bit of a catch all. We're not exactly sure what he's referring to, but what we can discern is that regardless of who these people are, these false teachers are ones that are Jewish leaders or teachers connected to the Old Testament or the Old Covenant, but also connected to the church. and they have profoundly obscured the freedom that the gospel offers. And this freedom, particularly to non-Jewish Christians.

[11 : 10] It would seem that at the very least that they are promoting a teaching that says Gentiles, in order to become Christians, need to first become Jews or at least adopt a ton of the traditions.

They're imploring the church, especially, I guess, pagan men, that they ought to be circumcised, which is the covenantal sign of ethnic Israel that we read about in the story of Abraham.

Paul is having none of it. He's having none of it. He states that they are not promoting the biblical view of circumcision at all. And there's a bit of a play on words here because in the original language, the word for circumcision would be to cut around.

Obviously, that's what happens. But when he says mutilators of the flesh, he is saying they are cutting off. That they have such a messed up, broken, profoundly obscure view of what circumcision is, what it was meant to be, that they aren't ones that cut around but actually cut off completely. And there's a bit of a double meaning here as well because not only are they ones that cut off, they dismember, but in promoting such a theology and a practice, people that follow them are dismembered from the church.

[12 : 41] Bit of a double meaning here as well. Again, Paul is having, he is having none of it. He states that they are not promoting this biblical view of circumcision for that sign in the flesh of being included in the covenant community has always had to include also a circumcision of the heart.

What is that? I mean, to sum it up, there's more to be said about it, but it's the trust in God and in his promises, to have faith in the one true God.

They are misreading the Bible, misunderstanding how God relates to his people, and misleading the Philippians into a spiritual, a kind of spiritual death. Paul refutes this in no uncertain terms in verse three where he says, for we are the circumcision, not them.

We are the circumcision who worship by the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. The real circumcision, the real mark of being in God's covenant community is the one who worships and serves the Lord God by faith, empowered by the spirit.

I mean, he sums it up in verse three. You could double click any of these and it would be well worth your time, but nevertheless, the real mark of being in the covenant community is the one who worships and serves the Lord by faith, empowered by the spirit, living for the glory of Christ and therefore not putting confidence in the outer signs as if they are enough, as if we curry God's favor by doing merely the things that he has asked us to do, but having hearts that are so self-centered, not turned towards him.

[14 : 29] It is the opposite of what he wants. And what is remarkable here is that he is certainly, certainly including non-Jews who are Christians into this company of people that are called the circumcision.

People that have not been circumcised, people that aren't a part of Israel are now called a part of the circumcision because of faith, because they are circumcised in their hearts.

And just in case that wasn't clear enough, Paul then gives his spiritual and ethnic and cultural and traditional bona fides, so to speak.

It's as if he's saying, listen, if this was the way to God, just merely following traditions, I'd be at the front of the line. This is why he says this. Look with me at verse four.

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh, also, if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.

[15 : 32] Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Verse seven, but whatever gain I had, whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Before we go on, let me just say this.

I think this is a very important thing, especially given the past year we've had and how our public discourse has played out since the terror attacks in Israel in October of 2023.

This text is not an anti-Jewish one. This is not Paul turning on his people. This is not a stick to beat unbelieving Jews over the head with.

We can't disregard God's people, Israel. Paul has not turned on his people.

[16:38] Paul is not disregarding the entirety of the Old Testament. He is not saying that to be a Jew matters not at all. Paul is saying what the Old Testament has always said.

That is, salvation is by faith. It's not in keeping Sabbaths. It's not in keeping holidays. It's not in keeping dietary laws and the giving of alms and charity.

What Paul's saying here is that there's a proper way of ordering our loves and our lives that result in a life of faith in the Messiah rather than in the things or the people or the status or the ethnicity or whatever it may be.

So, Paul is in line with Jesus here. If you remember, Jesus in Luke 14, verse 26, he says this. I would say equally, maybe even more provocative than what Paul is saying here.

If anyone, this is Jesus, quote, if anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

[17:42] I think what Paul is doing is using a type of Semitic hyperbole. Paul is saying something very similar to what Jesus is saying.

The reality is Paul doesn't hate his Jewish identity. He is one. He can't change who he is. He is not disparaging of his ethnicity, but he's simply stating that he does not place any, any eternal confidence in it.

His ethnicity and heritage are therefore appropriately ordered. In fact, Paul says, he continues on, right, in verse 7, if you will read that again, but whatever gain I had.

So he gives quite the list, but then he says, whatever, which is a bit of a catch-all for everything, whatever it may be, whatever that I have put my gain in, I count it as a loss.

He is further broadening this list to include anything that we could possibly put our eternal hope in. Many of us in this room have worked extremely hard to obtain their education, their career to build businesses, to serve faithfully as public servants or in the armed forces, have strived really hard reading dozens of books on how to be a good parent and a spouse, how to create a home that nurtures and gives life, to care for people, to give charity.

[19:19] These are all beautiful and wonderful pursuits. However, if we elevate them to a position of eternal significance, they are, as Paul says in verse 8, rubbish.

And I will just say this, the polite, lovely people at Crossway, I guess they came up with the English Standard Version, very nice way of saying excrement, but it's not even excrement that they say.

It's a bad word, starts with an S. Like it is, Paul is really saying something like listen, anything, anything apart from Christ that you put your hope in, it is excrement.

And you know what it's supposed to do? It's supposed to make you feel uncomfortable. And maybe some of you are feeling uncomfortable. Maybe if I actually said it, you'd really say it. I'm not going to say it. But you're supposed to feel uncomfortable with it.

What, my family? My career? The business I've built? The charity that I'm a part of? I mean, you name it. Think about it. Take a minute. Think about that thing that you value, that you're proud of.

[20:23] By the way, it's not bad to be proud of something that you've worked towards, but that you've put an extra degree of hope in. Paul is saying, you've turned it into excrement.

It's a very jarring thing, he is saying. So he's warning the Philippians to avoid these false teachers. And really, anybody, it's not just the Jewish false teachers, it's any ideology, any philosophy, any other religion, anything that is pushing you away from Christ and towards a false sense of eternal hope to avoid such teachers.

false spirituality, it devalues Christ, and it will have the effect of elevating the self to a very disgusting level.

So what follows is a reflection. Paul will, he'll hone in on what it means to have properly ordered loves and a properly ordered life and a properly ordered whole series, a hierarchy of hope, so to speak.

showing us that the Bible is incredibly wise and actually this is for our joy. What it does is it relieves us of the burdens we carry, it frees us to live and love in a properly ordered way.

[21:51] So, the second point of reflection. Look with me at verses 7 and we'll read to verse 11. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss 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, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

The only gain that will satisfy our deepest longings, that will give us real, true, genuine, eternal satisfaction is Christ.

It's Christ. To have Christ is to be united to him, to know him is of surpassing worth. Again, Paul, right, just previously is saying, if anybody has confidence in the flesh, it's me.

Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. All of it is nothing compared to knowing Christ, to being found in him. This is because we are created to know Christ and be known by him, to have a relationship with the living God, to be his friend.

[23 : 27] And if that seems old hat or this is just a classic thing that is said in church, I think it's because the church has been lazy in reducing the entirety of the Christian life into the phrase it's not a religion, it's a relationship.

But let's just take a moment to consider how bold of an idea this truly is, that God has made a way for us to be his friend. human beings are deeply relational. There's no way around it.

A few weeks back, maybe you'd remember if you were here, I talked about the real life Mowgli, the story that the Jungle Book was written about. It was a boy that was lost in the woods and was raised by a pack of wolves.

No human interaction and as a result, never learned to talk. The best he learned to do was smoke. He died in his early 30s. It was a really horrendous story.

But he didn't have that human relational component. And really, there is no way around it. We are built to know and be known. We cannot exist in a healthy way without meaningful relationships where bonds of deep friendship and camaraderie are developed and are reciprocal.

[24 : 44] And when we don't have that, we suffer. We have all the money we want, we have all the opportunities we want. If our relationships are broken down, we suffer in a very, very deep way to be vulnerable with people, to have friendships that are deep in their depth.

This is what it means to be human. This is how God has designed us. And so the Bible is incredibly wise in this regard. from the opening paragraphs of Genesis, we see God creating human beings and then creating them to be together.

And not only that, the implication of the garden account in Genesis and then all of what comes after that is God walking with man in this relationship.

In the cool of the day, there's this really profound picture of what it means to know God and be known by him. And because of the fall, because of sin entering into the human condition, almost the entirety of the Bible, I'd say the entirety of the Bible is a story about how we're trying to figure out a way to connect with God again.

Except we fail time and time and time and time and time over. Why? Because we, although we know our deep desire to know God and be known by him, our attempts to achieve it are futile.

[26 : 08] we treat people as a means to an end. We snub our nose at the lordship of Christ, of God.

To put it another way, humanity has disordered loves. They have put trust and hope and security in created things and not the creator.

And the result is a further perpetuation and alienation from God. The Bible describes this as enmity with God. We are not his friends but actually hostile enemies.

So the only way that this is remedied is not through continual willpower but through the provision that only God can give, that God himself will make us right.

or put another way, that we would have right standing before him. Only he can deal with our disordered loves. Only he can make unrighteous people righteous.

[27 : 14] Only he can mend what was torn. Only he can clean what is stained. Only he can offer his friendship to his enemies. He makes the first move.

He takes the initiative in all of this. It's really a remarkable thing. And our response is to receive it by faith. James chapter 2 reflecting on the life of Abraham says that Abraham trusted in God or believed in God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

And Abraham was called a friend of God. A human being is a friend of the infinite uncreated one. It really is a remarkable thing to meditate upon and to dwell on.

This is what God offers. This is what God has done. And this is what Paul is getting at here. The ultimate prize and desire of the human heart is friendship with God and this is the surpassing worth that Paul is talking about in verse 8.

This is the high point of our existence. And it is so ultimate, it is so ultimate that the power of the resurrection, sharing in the sufferings of Christ, being like him in his death, even having Christ's righteousness imputed to us, him making us right, it serves the purpose of knowing God.

[28 : 39] The high point is knowing God. All this stuff is interconnected. I don't want to start parsing out all of this, but knowing God, and I'll just say this, living forever without knowing God isn't heaven.

It is a type of hell. So it would be great where we were risen from the grave, never to taste death again, but then we continue on in this life.

Maybe we'll make friends, maybe we won't, maybe we'll suffer loss, maybe we won't, maybe we'll be disappointed, maybe we will hurt people, but it continues on. We don't know God, we're not known by him.

That isn't heaven, that's a type of hell. So you see, the ultimate prize isn't the resurrection, the resurrection leads us to the ultimate prize, which is Christ himself, friendship with God.

Years and years ago, I had a layover in Paris. I was young and single, I didn't, I had a bit of money, it was 11 p.m. till 8 a.m., I was going to see the sites, I was going to meet locals, this was going to be great.

[29 : 50] I was going to take the train down to whatever station is at the Notre Dame Cathedral, I looked at it, it's beautiful, it's all lit up, and like within an hour I'm cold, I'm lonely, I'm hungry, I have nobody to hang out with, I feel like this is not what I envisioned.

We could go to the grandest place in the world, paradise on earth, or in the heavens, and if we are alone without Christ, I am telling you it will not be worth it.

We are made, we are made to know him, this is what the pinnacle of life is all about. The prize is Christ, being friends with him, everything flows to this, everything flows from this, this is reality itself, he has made it possible through the cross, he has mended what has been torn, again healed what has been diseased, and all of a sudden we begin to see what a rightly ordered life can look like.

What a prize, God himself, a friendship that will never be reneged, we will never experience betrayal, there will always be joy and gladness and love to be enjoyed for eternity.

The best friendship you've had, and the best moment in that friendship you've ever had, it is on steroids forever, it is wonderful, it's something that we can't quite comprehend, but this is the promise made to us in Christ Jesus.

[31 : 25] So, if we can consider the warnings again, we begin to see how this is something that we can't purchase, this is something that we can't have because we've amassed so much wealth, this is not something that we can build towards, or give towards, it's not a transaction whereby we go to God with more black than red, or we say, I have done everything in the flesh, I am circumcised.

We can't get that because it is not our initiative that connects us with God, but his with us. So what does this do? It obliterates boasting, it obliterates pride.

And to teach something else, these false teachers, maybe some of us, God forbid your pastor, but to teach something else is hellish, and it is evil, and it is dismembering.

It promises something that can never deliver, it robs us of joy and delight in the friendship with God himself in Christ Jesus our Lord. God, we can also begin to see that this really is a joyful message. What is being offered is not one of difficulty, because what we're going to see next, right, in verses, in verse 10 and 11, Paul is talking about suffering like Christ and even sharing in his death, that doesn't seem like a joyful thing, but what ends up happening is that our priorities shift, and such a friendship marks our life, and we see life through the lens of friendship, eternal friendship with Christ Jesus, not through the broken lens of this world, and we get the honor and privilege of participating in the reconciliation of the world.

[33 : 27] We begin to be the tools in the master's hands. God uses us to achieve his means, not because he needs us, but because we get to participate in it.

We get to see people come to this beautiful realization as well. But we live in this world, and when the rubber hits the road, again, Paul is reminding this church, because the joy is almost certainly

faded, when the rubber hits the road, we struggle to trust in Christ. We struggle to believe in his promises.

We struggle to believe that his friendship is really on offer, and is really ours forever, that he is enough to satisfy us. So Paul, in this final section, will help us to recognize and admit our frailty, and look to Christ for help, and it really is a call to look upwards.

And this will be our final section, and we'll wrap it up with this. Let me read verses 12 to 16. Page 16, if you're following along. Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

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 outward call of God in Christ Jesus.

[35 : 03] Listen, we have heavenly citizenship. If you have put your faith in Christ, if you are baptized in him, you have heavenly citizenship. It's a wonderful thing, but you live in an earthly reality.

We have a great day, and we have a great time to be swayed, and we have a great time to be swayed, and tempted to trust in ourselves, and this world, and the promises of wealth, and pleasure, and comfort, instead of Christ himself.

This is our reality until the day we breathe our last, or Christ comes home. And such a life, it cannot be lived in perfection. It will be full of setbacks and slip-ups.

And Paul recognizes this. Thank you to Paul, but thank you to the Lord for recognizing our continued frailty, even though we are saved. And what does he say? He doesn't give in to defeatism.

He says, no, no, no, I press on to make this reality my own. And this, I think, is potentially one of the greatest promises and realities for us today.

[36 : 05] Verse 12, I press on to make my own. Here it is. Because Christ Jesus has made me his own. The language here is that he has taken hold of me.

If you remember the Apostle Paul, he's on his way. He was Saul of Tarsus at the time, the disciple of Gamaliel, the Pharisee full of zeal on his way to Damascus to imprison believers, bring them back to Jerusalem to suffer, maybe to be killed.

And Jesus knocks him on his rear end and takes hold of his life. Takes hold of his life. And Paul is saying, Christ has done this.

And for anybody in Christ, that's what has happened to you. He has taken hold of you. Before you could take hold of him, he has taken hold of you.

And friends, this means that he has a grip on your life that is far greater than your grip on him. And in response, what do we do? We seek to obey him from that place of love and security.

[37 : 17] Because Christ Jesus has taken hold of the Apostle Paul, Paul can now take hold of Jesus. He has taken hold of Jesus. He has taken hold of Jesus. Pursuing his prize, which is Christ himself. It's all by faith in what Christ has done.

The call of God is to himself as a prize. This is it. This is the Christian faith. It really is that. It is not the call to a paradise where we will just have hedonistic pleasures forever on tap.

That is not the call. The call is a friendship with the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, where we will know the divine love and we will see him with an unveiled face.

Throughout church history, this has been called the beatific vision. That we will know God and be known by him and we will be in his presence without a veil, without anything separating us.

We will just be in his presence. And it will be the culmination of our existence. So you see, going back to the warning, this warning isn't like a downer.

[38 : 28] This warning is a gift to us. It's a reminder that, listen, putting our hope and our strength in the flesh, whatever that may be, it will not bring us joy.

It will not spill over into eternity. It will not help us to flourish. And it certainly won't cause us to see God's face and to enjoy him forever. So friends, let us not waste our time with these things.

The things of this world, they cannot provide us with the presence of God. Let us consider them as a loss. Let us properly order our lives by God's strength and understand that the real worth in life, the real surpassing glory and worth of what it means to be a human being is knowing Christ and being known by him.

So let us heed these warnings and remember that Christ has made us his own. And take that to the bank, okay? Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, we are a frail bunch.

We read your word. We are gripped by your gospel. And the reality is by Monday, maybe Tuesday, maybe this afternoon, we will begin to forget.

[39 : 45] We will have a lapse in our memory. We'll begin to trust in other things. Lord, have mercy upon us. Lord, remind us every day that you have taken hold of us and that out of that we can take hold of you, that the friendship that you have promised us in eternity begins right now and that you will help us as we strain towards heaven, as we look towards you and remember that you have called us up.

Lord, help some of us, maybe all of us, to not dwell in the past, whether that is in regret or in pride, but instead let us look forward.

Let us look to Christ. What a wonderful prize. What a wonderful gift that you have given us. Friendship with you. Amen.