

Let's Press On

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[0 : 00] All right. Let me lead us in prayer as we proceed to move on to the reading, the hearing of God's word, and the explanation of it in this sermon.

Our God and Father, we thank you that you've given us your scriptures. You've not left us without a revelation of who you are. We recognize, God, that if it were not for your freely chosen decision to reveal to us who you are in the world around us that you created, and especially in these scriptures in the Bible, if it were not for this, we would not know you.

We would not understand you. We would be left alone in this world. But we thank you that you are a God who does reveal himself.

And this morning, as we look, we reveal what you have called us to in the Christian life. And we ask, Lord God, that we may take this to heart because we know that you have sent your son into the world to save the world, to call us to something better than the life that we would otherwise be living, to call us to something good, something glorious.

So give us eyes to see it, ears to hear it, hearts to understand what we otherwise would not understand. Hold me back, Lord God, from saying anything untrue, anything false, anything foolish or destructive.

[1 : 38] And may the words that I use properly reflect who you are. And Lord, even if all, for each of us here, even if all we do is we take to heart, even one sentence, even one takeaway, even one word, that is exactly what you need for us.

Lord, we give you thanks for that. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, last Saturday, I had the privilege of being a part of the Squamish 50, right?

That 50-mile run that happens once a year. And before you think, wow, Dave, what an amazing person you are, I was just a course marshal. And that means that I basically stood at Stump Lake for a couple of hours early in the morning, and several dozen runners who were far more experienced than I am, people who, like, when you watch them run, you're like, this is basically an alien, right?

This is, you know, their physiology, their ability is just non-human, I feel like. And my job was just to stand there and to tell these far more experienced runners to turn left.

And I personally think I did a great job. So you can come pat me on the back, congratulate me for the good work that I did after the service. But, you know, I thought, you know, maybe I should do more than just that.

[3 : 06] And I should cheer the runners on as they're going by. You know, maybe they need it. Maybe that would be helpful to them, right? So I decided I was going to run a little bit of an experiment while I was there.

So for a couple hours, I ran an experiment. I wanted to test out which words of encouragement seemed to be the most effective. What seemed to actually help people? What seemed to, you know, give them a little bit of energy?

And so I said a lot, I tried out a lot of different things to runners, you know, tried out the old standbys. Let's go! Keep it up! Good work! And based on their reactions, you know, I might as well have been, you know, enthusiastically reading the ingredients off the back of a cereal box. You know, it's sort of like a, you know, I'm sure they were grateful for it, but it didn't really seem to add a lot to their running experience. So I finally, after a little bit of work, discovered the secret slogan.

That's right. The words that put a smile on nearly every runner's face. The words that seemed to put a little bit of energy into their steps. And I'm going to tell you what the magic words are.

[4 : 09] I told them this, the road is long, but you've got this. I don't know what it was about that, but like almost every single runner just got this huge grin on their face, and they just seemed so enthusiastic.

Something, and I think the secret is, you name the deep difficulty of the task, right? You don't ignore it. You name the deep difficulty of the task, and then you reassure them that it can still be done, that it's still possible.

And that seems to encourage people. That seems to get through to them when just simple, empty words and slogans don't. Now, perhaps you're in a season in life of weariness, and there seems to be a general trend in our culture, a general trend among most people I know, in which there's a growing sense of weariness, a growing sense of being overwhelmed by all the things coming at people in life, a rapidly changing world that we are struggling to get accustomed to.

And just when you're starting to figure out how things work, things change again. And it's harder to get by in life than perhaps it used to be.

Maybe you feel that way. You're under a lot of pressure. Your attention, a very limited resource. Your attention is needed everywhere all at once. And you wonder, can I continue the Christian life like this?

[5 : 39] Then on the other hand, there are some of us here for whom life is pretty good. You feel like you've got it under control. You're moving pretty steadily through life.

Things seem to be in good, good order. And if you're honest with yourself, if I were to challenge you on like, hey, let's live this Christian life, you'd be honest with me that you're lacking motivation.

You're not feeling any pressing need to press on to be the man or woman that God has called you to be. But let's press on. Let's turn to Philippians chapter 3, verses 12 through 16.

Now, if you're using one of the Bibles at a rusher's handout, you'll find this on page 981. On page 981, Philippians 3, verses 12 through 16. And the Apostle Paul, he's writing to the first century church in Philippi.

This is a wonderful little letter, this book of Philippians. And he is going to share with us this mindset that keeps moving him forward, keeps pressing him forward, whether life is easy or hard, as he puts it later on.

[6 : 49] You know, whether he's brought low, whether he's abounding, whether he's facing plenty and hunger, whether he's in abundance or need, yet he continues to press on.

What is going on? How is he able to do that? Now, some of us have this idea that Paul and other heroes of the faith, they're basically, they're like those ultramarathoners.

They're basically another species, sort of like aliens, right? And we read the Apostle Paul and we're like, okay, that's nice for him, but I'm a human and he's not. These guys seem, at first glance, if you're not reading the Bible carefully, they seem like they're floating through life and they're just filled with ambition and charisma.

They're bursting with joy wherever they go. Nothing gets them down. You know, they have it all figured out. They're basically perfect. They've basically arrived. They're not like you. Imagine what Paul would be like if that, if he were, let's be honest, if he were actually like that, if Paul were this modern guy, sort of this modern man who's got himself all put together, who's finally arrived, he's got it all made, perhaps you might see him posting on social media some sort of slogan that sounds like this.

He might say something like this, for my part, I've already got what I want. I've got my faith all worked out. No need to press on to grasp that resurrection.

[8 : 22] I'm already my own man. I'm not in the grasp of anyone else. Brothers, hey, that's the way I think. I've already grasped everything I need. Now that I've arrived, I can look back satisfied at my progress.

I can finally relax. Proud of who I am. Proud of what I've achieved. I've already got heaven. What better could heaven have to offer? I don't see the need for a goal or prize beyond this.

God, what's compelling me to anything greater? But it's for you, you know, hey, you've got to do your own thing. You think whatever you want. Whatever mentality you have, it's all the same in God's eyes.

If you want to find your own path to run, go find it. Just get there fast. Wow, so inspiring, right? I mean, that does sound a lot like a lot of social media posts, to be honest, right?

Such an influencer that guy would be. He would really be just caught up in this modern mentality. But what we're going to read is not the mindset that I just spoke.

[9 : 26] Here's his real mindset that we see in verses 12 through 16. Notice the contrast. Not that I have already obtained this or I'm 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, straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature think this way. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

So that's a little different. Now the other one may have felt good for the author to write, but this one feels better to read, doesn't it?

Because this is not alien. This is what the Christian life is meant to look like. It is meant to look like and feel like a race, a race run with a sense of confidence and a sense of expectation that moves the runners toward the finish line despite a long and difficult and wearying journey.

[10 : 58] The road is long. But Jesus Christ has got this on your behalf. Running a race doesn't always feel great.

In order to keep running, you just cannot simply willpower your way to the end. Nobody running the Squamish 50 is just in the middle of the race going, I don't really care how this ends. I don't really care where the finish line is.

I'm just happy to keep running. They're motivated because they see in their mind's eye that finish line, that high five from, was it Gary Robbins? Is that the one?

You know, the honor of finishing the race, the prize. You have to answer four questions if you're going to finish that race, if you're going to keep pressing on. The four questions are, number one, why are you running this race?

Number two, how will you run this race? Number three, where are you running to? Number four, what pace should you run? So let's start with that first one. Let's start with that question.

[11 : 56] Why are you running this race? Now, when I was serving as a lowly course marshal, right, I not only got to greet runners in the forest, but they were not the only ones walking down that path along Stump Lake.

There were other people just going for a morning walk with their dogs, and of course many of them were wondering what was going on, why all these signs, all these random runners with bibs racing through the woods, and they were confused about what's going on.

Why are these people running this race? What is this thing? Well, one reason that people run the race is quite simple, okay?

You're running the race because you haven't reached your goal yet. You don't stop running until you get there. You'll notice that once people reach the finish line, they don't keep running.

They stop. And we keep running because we aren't there. Paul says that twice. Verse 12, and he does that twice because he knows that people might get this impression from reading what he's writing that Paul's already arrived.

[13 : 04] He's already there. He's reached that higher plane of perfection. In verse 12, he reiterates, not that I have already obtained this or I'm already perfect.

Notice again in verse 13, he says, brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. Paul has not yet arrived at where he intends to go.

You're running because you're not yet at the finish line. And if you get to know enough Christians from wide varieties of different traditions, you'll find that there are people who have this idea that has been taught to them that you can get a second blessing from the Holy Spirit and the second blessing zaps you into a state of Christian perfection where you're totally set free from the presence of sin in your life.

You no longer do anything that displeases God, they say. Anything you want, anything you choose is entirely good. Wouldn't that be great? Imagine going through life without confidence that everything I'm doing is without sin.

I'm never doing anything wrong. Well, Paul is pretty clear. If there is such a state in this present life, he's not there.

[14 : 17] Because his aim, Paul's aim is that he wants his life to take on the same shape that Jesus' life took. He wants his life to look like Jesus.

That's why he writes in verse 10, just right before this, he says, he says that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

So sometimes in the past you've heard me talk about how there is this shape to the Christian life that is like the letter J, that we descend down into suffering, shame, and death, just like Jesus did. And that God raises us up to new resurrection life. And so our life looks like we suffer like Jesus did. We love and go into that descent of love that Jesus went through.

We repent of our sins and turn away, dying to self every day. And we are trusting that we are not going to stay down at the bottom of that J curve, but rather that God is going to raise us up to new life, just like he did for Jesus.

[15 : 26] And that resurrection is going to come in the new heavens, the new earth. But the good news is we get glimpses of it in the here and now, those little moments in your life where you see God come through, God giving power, God giving glory, God doing great things, even in our own little deaths that we encounter.

And Paul says, that's what I want my life to look like. That my goal is that my life looks like Jesus' life. And every Christian's life looks like that.

Paul says, I'm not there yet. He says he is not dying to himself and his desires every day as he ought to do. And as a result, he's not experiencing that new, those glimpses of new resurrection life from God to the degree that he would love to see in his own life.

But his life is looking more and more like that every day. It's not a perfect imitation yet, though. Paul is not yet perfect. If Paul believed that he were perfect, I think it's safe to say, well, sorry, if Paul himself didn't view himself as having arrived, I think it's safe to say that it's utterly arrogant for you and I to believe that we have exceeded him.

That we're more holy than this man who wrote half of the New Testament. That in our righteousness and progress, we surpassed him.

[17 : 00] Now, perhaps it might seem ridiculous to you that someone would make such a claim towards that perfection and maturity that I have arrived. But there are people who do. Now, perhaps we don't make that claim outwardly, but I think some of us live our lives like we have arrived.

Like it is true. Like I'm there. When I left home for the first time to attend university, if you had asked me, Dave, are you sinlessly perfect?

I would have said, oh, well, of course not. I'm a sinner like everybody else. But functionally, then I kind of acted like it. I absolutely thought I had the Christian faith all figured out.

I was 18 years old and I had it all figured out. I knew what it was to be a Christian. I was a pastor's kid. I grew up in church. I took the Christian faith more seriously than all my peers.

And I'd even read the Bible all the way through. How many teenagers have done that? Cover to cover. What more? I read it all the way through.

[18 : 09] What more was there to learn? Well, I soon found out that I didn't know what I didn't know. And we've all had that experience, right?

Where you think you know it all, but you actually have no idea that there's so much that you don't even know you don't know. Let me tell you what.

It's not the things. There's some things that you know you don't know, right? That you're like, I know this is a thing. I just don't know about it. That's not what ought to concern us.

What ought to concern us is the things that you don't know you don't know. Those are where your blind spots are going to be, right? You have no idea. There is so much to the Christian life, so much to our faith, that you just don't even know there's a question there.

You've never experienced it before. But sometimes life comes at you fast, and all of a sudden you've got to realize there are some things, questions that have never even crossed my mind that now are life-critical questions that I've got to find the answer to.

[19 : 10] Those are the areas that God often wants you to make progress in. But that's only possible if you adopt the mindset that I haven't arrived yet.

God has things in store for you that you cannot even begin to imagine now. They're not even a category of thought in your mind right now. And God has them in store for you.

Now, Paul offers a second reason for why you're still running this race. Here's the reason that he gives for himself in verse 12. I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his

own.

I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. So Paul is thinking back to how he first came to know Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul is under no illusions. He knows that God chose him. He knows Jesus Christ was grasping a hold of him. Because if you read Acts chapter 9, you read the story of Paul and his conversion, you see that he was persecuting the church of God.

[20 : 25] He was running 180 degrees in the opposite direction. He was on his way to the city of Damascus to arrest and imprison Christians there. He was trying to stamp out the church to erase all memory of Jesus as the Christ.

And there on that road to Damascus, he was blinded by a light from heaven and Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, appeared to Paul. Paul knows that he was summoned out of sin and out of darkness into this ministry that he now finds himself in.

Paul knows that he is in this race because Jesus Christ grabbed hold of him. He is like a man who has been caught up in the very race that Jesus himself has run to perfection.

A race in which Jesus says, Paul, you are running this with me. Welcome to the family. A race in which Paul lays down his life daily.

A race of repentance. A race of suffering. A race of love for others. A race in which the only way he can run this is if he is depending entirely on God for resurrection life and power every day.

[21 : 43] Only by running that race does Paul come to know Jesus Christ. I want to tell you this.

The Christian life, the doctrines of the Christian faith, and the scriptures will be very boring to you if you are not running this race.

At most they will see mildly interesting as historical curiosity. But if you read the Bible and you find yourself yawning, I would encourage you, maybe the problem is you are not running the race. I think of how many times I've been in conversations, and I'm sorry if I hurt some feelings by saying this, but in conversations where I'm with a group of people talking about mountain biking, and they're so into the conversation, I'm like, because I don't mountain bike.

I don't know what they're talking about. It just seems like a curiosity. You know, some of it's kind of interesting, so I hang in there. But I'm not drawn into it because I'm not doing it.

The Bible comes alive when you're doing it. When you are running the race, when you are encountering the challenges that Jesus Christ himself encountered, when you are pressing on, God's word comes alive.

All of a sudden, all those doctrines that seem boring, they matter now. They seem glorious and good. Only by running this race does Paul come to know Jesus Christ.

[23 : 19] He talks about that fellowship of his sufferings, that we draw near to him as we're walking that same path he walked. Jesus becomes beautiful and wonderful. Like, the more that I walk the path he walks in my life, the more I read these gospel accounts, I read the way that he talked to people, the way he related to people, all the things he did.

He went through, all the things he taught. I'm like, wow. I never saw him that way before. I can't believe how good he is. I can't believe how wise he is, how perfect he is.

When we run his footsteps, we realize that he is with us. We begin to see him for who he is. That is what Jesus grasped a hold of you for. If you are a Christian.

Jesus didn't grasp a hold of you so that you can sit on the sidelines, watch other people run, and kind of yawn as you're watching it. Jesus grasped a hold of you so that you could enter the race that he ran.

So you could come to know him in the very process of running it. That's exactly what Paul talks about in Philippians 3. Everything he counts to loss because it's worth it to know Christ, to run that race, to run it with him.

[24 : 34] Now, why are you running this race? It's these reasons we just gave. Because you haven't arrived yet. Because Jesus Christ grasped you for this very purpose. So now then, second question.

How will you run this race? How will you run it? Paul says in verse 13, One thing I do. There's only one way to run this thing. There is only one mentality that will get you to the finish line.

That will move you step by step. No matter what obstacles are in your path. Paul tells us what it is. What that mentality is in this verse. He says it is forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

First, you forget what lies behind. Now, that doesn't mean you have amnesia, right? And I've seen some people do this. They have this idea, well, I've become a Christian now. Everything that happened in my past doesn't matter anymore.

It's like God hit this reset button in my life. All my past history, all the struggles, all the deep hurts and struggles in my life doesn't matter anymore. It's all gone, erased. That's not what Paul's saying here.

[25 : 42] What he is saying, if you look at this larger context of chapter 3, is that your attention is not what's behind you. What's behind you no longer defines you.

It's significant, but it does not enslave you and does not define you anymore. Imagine a Squamish 50 runner, who as she is running is constantly looking over her shoulder with every step.

She's running a difficult, treacherous trail. There's rocks and roots everywhere, sharp turns, bears. But she's always running like this.

What's going to happen? She'll get tripped up by what's in front of her, run headlong into a tree, fall into a lake. Who knows? So instead, even though she knows what's behind her, she knows what it is.

She doesn't fixate on what's behind her. Now, Paul isn't talking about acting like his past means nothing. I mean, he frequently discusses his past in his letters. He's very open about it.

[26 : 48] And he treats it as very significant. But what he's getting at is that the priorities, the boasts, the obsessions of his past are the priorities, boasts, and obsessions of a world that he's leaving behind.

In chapter 3, earlier on, Paul talks about his pedigree as a perfect Jew, a Hebrew of Hebrews. And as far as he's concerned, he's abandoned that and moved on.

He's no longer thinking of that as, yeah, that's my boast. That's the thing that I hold up that makes life worth living. Paul has moved on from that. Neither is his performance, his blameless obedience to God's law.

He's abandoned that too. He still obeys, but it no longer defines him, that he's got this, he's doing everything right. Throughout his letters, Paul warns about people who get caught up in earthly things like that, in your pedigree, in your performance, in self-indulgence, in worldly pleasures, in love of money, in political conspiracies, in spiritual speculations.

All these things are no longer where Paul is looking. His mind is not on what's behind him. His mind is set forward. It's set elsewhere. Because you no longer only forget what lies behind.

[28 : 06] You strain forward to what? What lies ahead. You strain toward what really matters. Because what defines you is where you are going. What defines a Squamish 50 runner is not where they were, but where they are going.

That finish line. Knowing Jesus Christ. That is what you strain for. Up in verse 8, Paul says, For his sake, for Jesus' 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.

You come to know him first, when you believe. By faith. By entrusting yourself to him. You accept that your righteousness is never going to be good enough.

You are not in the state of perfection. You cannot boast and hold up your own righteousness. You can't waltz into the heavenly courtroom and say to God, I belong here because I am good enough. Because I am a pretty good person. No. No. No. You are saved by grace, so that no one may boast.

[29 : 24] Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. That is all that we have going for us. That I know Jesus Christ. That I belong with him. That he calls me by his name. That I can walk into that heavenly courtroom and stand before God, and when he says, why do you belong in my heaven?

I'll say, because I'm with Jesus. And Jesus says, because he's with me. Because I belong wherever Jesus belongs. So I want to know him.

I trust that he died on my behalf, that he rose again on my behalf, that he ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God, and he will come to judge the living and the dead. That is where my faith is.

And you come to know him further as you live a life of obedience to him, because now you're not only identified with him, now you're living his life.

You're walking with him, experiencing him. As you walk in his footsteps, you understand who he is. You understand who he is for you. And soon it becomes the best thing in the world to you.

[30 : 29] For you to be called by the name of Jesus Christ. It becomes the best thing in the world to you to be associated with Jesus Christ, because he is the most glorious person that you know.

Think of a celebrity, perhaps, that you have always kind of wanted to meet, that if people saw you with this person, it would make your day.

That is how we feel about Jesus Christ. If only people could see me with him. That's where my glory is, that I'm with him.

You're straining toward that association and that connection. How will you run this race? You do what Jesus did. You forget the earthly things that lie behind.

You strain toward the heavenly things that lie ahead. Your mentality is, I want to know Christ. I want to belong to him and be defined by him. That's where my glory is. And that brings us to this question.

[31 : 35] Where are you running to? That's our third question. Where are you running to? Imagine running a race, as we said, in which you didn't know where the finish line was. And you didn't know what prize would be waiting for you at the end.

You were just running aimlessly through the woods, suffering the ups and downs of a long road, breathing in forest fire smoke. You know, never really knowing whether the end's worth it.

Never really knowing where this road is leading you. Never really knowing where it stops. What does that do to your motivation? What does that do to your confidence? The Christian life is, it's not just this life of grueling misery.

Sometimes it's portrayed that way. And sometimes some people seem to act like it is. It's not a life of hardship, suffering, dying to self, and there's no end in sight, the end. It is a life in which we trust. That yes, there is hardship, there is suffering, there's dying to self. There is that bottom of the J curve that we must go through. Even embrace. But we trust that we have a God who will make all things new.

[32 : 42] We have a God who will bring power and glory and resurrection life to us, just as he did for his son, Jesus Christ, the son whom he loved, whom he raised from the dead.

We too have a resurrection to look forward to. In verse 11, Paul explains that he is running this race, that by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

The idea that I might be raised to life the way Jesus Christ was, that I might be with him forever and ever, that I may have a new and glorious body like his, that motivates Paul, that animates Paul.

And that's why he writes down a little farther in verses 20 and 21. You can read where he says, our citizenship is in heaven. That's where our home is, our homeland.

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.

[33 : 59] To himself. Living in that hope, Paul is not a harsh and miserable man. He isn't a dour and prickly fellow. You know, it's so funny.

I sometimes read people who seem to think, they'll, they'll quickly read through Paul's letters and think, wow, what a grumpy guy. And, and I'm like, the more carefully you, you actually pay attention to what he's saying and how he's saying it.

He's not. I think you would find he's the most warm hearted. He gets Jesus like nobody that I know. He understands.

He has so much love and patience for these churches. These are the most, these, these new types of churches are the most dysfunctional churches you've ever heard of. Go read first Corinthians. If you doubt me, they are so messed up.

And Paul loves them and hangs in there with them and has compassion is so careful and so tender, challenges them, but sticks with them. I don't know anybody like that.

[34 : 55] I wouldn't do that. I'm not as far along as he is. He's not a glutton for punishment.

He's not harsh and miserable. He's a man whose eyes are filled with glory. He's a runner whose mind is filled with the prize.

He doesn't just have that high five and a nice gift certificate waiting for him at the finish line. He has the greatest glory the world has ever known. The glory of resembling Jesus Christ, remaining with him, identified with him forever and ever, body and soul.

And Paul's mindset sounds very much like what you find in 1 John chapter 3. In verses 2 and 3, here's how that same glory is described. Where John writes, beloved, we are God's children now.

And what we will be has not yet appeared. But we know that when he appears, when Jesus appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.

[36 : 09] And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. And here again, we have that idea. We've been grasped as God.

We've been grasped by God. Adopted into his family as his children. With him as our father. With Jesus Christ as our older brother. We have this upward calling to be like him.

Be holy because I am holy. That's God's way of saying to you, be like me. Be like your dad. Who we are has not yet appeared. But we shall be like God.

And we should be like his son, Jesus Christ, who is exactly like his father in every possible way. But we get to be like our older brother, Jesus Christ. And we know this because we will see him face to face.

And only those who are like him can remain with him forever and ever. And so you run. Everyone who thus hopes in him, who has that confidence and expectation, purifies himself as he is pure.

[37 : 09] So you run. You run with great hope. You run with great expectations. You purify yourself as Jesus Christ is pure. Learning how to conduct your life with holiness and love and a single-minded purpose with repentance, with obedience, you press on.

Where are you running to? You're running to see Jesus face to face. To become just like him in every way a human being can possibly be.

You're not doing this to earn a place in his family. We are God's children now. You're doing it because you're already a part of his family.

Jesus Christ has already grasped a hold of you. And so running this race, that's what we do in the family of God. That's just what we do. Welcome to God's family.

Let's live this way. You run because our citizenship is in heaven. You run because that's what heaven's people do. You run because you belong as a victor at the finish line.

[38 : 16] That's where you belong. So then, final question. What pace should you run? What pace should you run? That is an important question for every runner.

It's an important question for every Christian too. Every runner in a race knows the danger of setting the wrong pace. Of setting a pace, for example, that is more than your body can handle.

Whenever I'm hiking the chief with someone who's never done it before, you know the mistake every single person makes? Just tearing up those first stairs at full speed and you feel really like, man, I've got this for like the first two or three minutes and then reality catches up to you.

You don't make it at the top unless you pace yourself at the start. I always tell people, set a slower pace than you think. You want to make consistent progress to the end.

This is a long race. This is not a sprint. One thing that BK has said a few times in his sermons, I think this is a very wise point. He says, if you're a new Christian, he says, just enjoy it.

[39 : 24] Enjoy the newness of it. Learn what you can. Put into practice the new things you're learning because sometimes what people do is they become new and they actually correctly realize there's so much I don't know and they're so eager to devour anything and everything that they can learn and that's a good desire and you should be eager to learn new things but sometimes that desire to just accumulate and devour new information, we're desiring to devour things without putting them into practice.

Our head runs way in advance of our hearts and our hands and sometimes we need to have the patience of like, look, I actually can't even handle all those loads and loads and loads of new and deep and rich things like, I need to actually just take what I'm learning and start learning how to live it out faithfully where God's at and where he has me and over time in his patience, God will keep revealing those things.

Obsessive learning and spiritual maturity aren't the same thing. Now, some of us kind of need a little bit more learning, quite frankly, but our goal is not to become obsessive learners who are not putting into practice what we learned.

Our goal is to learn and to engage and to live it out. Now, when I'm counseling people, sometimes I have to communicate that same lesson, right? The people that I'm counseling, we're trying to learn how do we practice these new ways of living that Christ has given to us and sadly, I think many of us struggle because we have this idea of immediate perfection.

This idea that I can walk in and maybe in a session or two, there's this new insight that zaps me and all of a sudden, I'm released to now live everything perfectly and what, and sometimes people leave

just like leaving on a cloud from the counseling session and then five minutes later, of course, reality crashes in and like life hasn't actually changed.

[41 : 26] But this expectation that I should be able to go from never controlling my anger to being in total control in just an hour's time, that I ought to go from being consumed with anxiety to now I handle all my fears perfectly and then when that doesn't happen, we beat ourselves up, ashamed of our failure to be perfect all at once.

Do you think that's the mentality God has toward you? Do you realize that God is far more patient with us than we are with one another, with ourselves? What I love is that Paul, who is very Christ-like in his patience, he has words of encouragement for you if you feel like you just can't seem to get it perfect.

Back again, Philippians chapter 3, you'll find in verses 15 and 16 these words. Let those of us who are mature think this way and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Now Paul says that people who are mature, people who have a mindset very much like Jesus Christ, people who are really far ahead in that race, whose lives look like his.

He's like, they think the way that Paul's describing, their lives are taking on that J-curve, they realize, they embrace that, they're making those sorts of decisions, living with that mentality, they're running the race faithfully and Paul freely admits though that there are people in the church who, as he puts it, think otherwise.

[43 : 02] Right? There are people sitting here who think otherwise. their mentality isn't there. Still living in the old way, still looking for things to boast in, still looking for identities and things other than Christ, still trying to avoid and get out and shortcut their way out of sufferings and repentance and out of love and they haven't yet fully adopted the mindset of Jesus Christ.

People who know the right thing to do and they're maybe only doing it like 5 to 10% of the time and Paul says, God will reveal that also to you and I love that.

That quiet confidence that Paul has that God is at work in your life revealing things in his timing and this is why as your pastor, there are, to be frank, there are some of you that I know God has some very important work to do in your life and up till now you have not been ready for it.

Perhaps you have even been resistant towards it. I am trusting that in his timing he will get to you for your good.

Something that I have learned in my own life is often the things that I wish God would get to with me, he doesn't seem to be getting to and I'm getting very frustrated by that but I've often found that there is a lot more work of preparation he has to do under the hood, a lot more other things he needs to work on before he reveals the big changes that he has in store for me.

[44 : 43] God does not work at our pace, he does not work with our priorities, his agenda is very different from ours because he knows us better than we know ourselves, he loves us more and he is wiser.

As your pastor it's my privilege often to wait patiently to be ready to be there when the time comes that God says now is the time to make those changes. Likewise when I'm counseling with people I celebrate with them when they go from hey maybe last week or last month they were obeying 5% of the time and now they're obeying 10% of the time.

Yeah, progress. That's good news. That's growth. That's maturity. That's progressive sanctification. That's the good news of God at work.

God will reveal that also to you. Just keep pressing on. Your pace may not be swift but in good time it will get you where God needs you to go.

So with those words of patience Paul concludes with this simple word of warning. He says only let us hold true to what we have attained. When you're running a race stay on the trail.

[45 : 59] Don't wander off into the woods. Don't wander off after people who are on a different path than Jesus was on. When I was serving last weekend as a course marshal you know to be honest for nearly the whole time I was there I was wondering why did they put me here?

I'm at this really obvious trail intersection. You're at Stump Lake the signs are all clearly saying going left it seems super obvious that you should go left. Why do they have me here of all places? And then towards the end of the race I learned why because somebody some walkers took a right turn to avoid the runners and as they were walking then a runner followed them and guess what that runner did?

Saw the people walking and taking a right and immediately just without thinking took a right and I was there to say nope nope wrong left and that saved the day for that person right? All of a sudden I understood why I was there to warn to say you're going off on the wrong trail only let us hold true to what we have attained don't wander off the trail look look at the people who maybe you may be tempted to wander off trail after do they love and know Jesus Christ as Lord? [47:16] Do they glory in him? Do they hold fast to the confession of faith and to the doctrine that have been handed down from one generation to the next? If not don't follow them even if they seem well meaning even if they seem wonderful people if they are not motivated to run the same race Jesus ran don't follow hold true to the doctrine that you have received as we read in Hebrews chapter 10 we read let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging each other and all the more as you see the day drawing near you see this is the exact same thing Paul's saying the exact same thing John was saying this consistent message hold fast the confession of your hope and of your great expectations in Jesus Christ hold fast to what you have learned add to it keep moving forward at the pace that God has given to you press on

God will get you to the end of the race in his time I'm preaching these things to you from God's word not to browbeat anyone but to offer warnings and encouragement to those who are identifying as Christian but who are idle and nonchalant about your progress in the faith who think you've got it all worked out here's your takeaway you are nowhere near arrived you are nowhere near arrived be warned the Lord disciplines those he loves think of that with fear and trembling the Lord will let reality hit you like a ton of bricks because he loves you if he has loved you then he will do anything and everything in his power to get you back on track and cause you to press on to those who are faint-hearted who are beating yourself up about your failures your takeaway is this the Lord knows and he is patient a bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not quench hold fast your confession press on as you are able in his time the Lord will bring you power life and glory he is at work and he has not abandoned you to those who are weak or lacking in knowledge come and ask for help this is a race you are not meant to run alone we saw in Hebrews let's consider how do we stir up one another to love and good works let's not neglect to meet together let's not wander off like Lone Ranger Christians wandering off and running our own race that are you know apart from others one thing that's fun to watch by the way this quality is how many runners were just like buddying up with other runners and talking and encouraging each other as they went that's the way to run run together all the more as you see the day drawing near encourage each other that's what we're here for in the rest of the book of Philippians

Paul is clear that he has not been running this race alone he's been running it together he talks about his partners in the gospel how much he prizes and cherishes them men like Timothy and Epaphroditus women like Euodia and Syntyche and he runs they all run together in the presence of Jesus Christ our Lord you're feeling that weakness and you're feeling like I just don't know what I'm doing I can't run this race everything's too much come and get help this is what the church is for that is what we're here for let's press on and let's press on together our God and Father we are weak but you are strong we in ourselves do not have what it takes to live the Christian life it cannot be lived apart from your spirit the same Holy Spirit who dwelt in Jesus Christ whom he gives to everyone who believes in him

Lord may we learn to turn from our sin and repent and humble ourselves before you and run the race may we learn to when when evil is not only inside us but sometimes it comes at us from the outside and we suffer in those times let us suffer as Jesus did faithfully and holding fast and when we go after evil in love when we are there to help others and warn them and encourage them when we hold fast to the truth despite opposition would you sustain us by the power of your spirit Lord God I know how many people have wandered from the path I know many people who have grown up in Christian homes and have turned away from you it seems almost the norm now and so I ask for each of us here that we may take this seriously and run the race with perseverance fixing our eyes on Jesus for his sake we have suffered the loss of all things may we suffer even as we suffer further loss may we say that we have lost nothing at all because we have him forever and ever amen