

Partners for Eternity

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[0 : 00] Good morning friends, I'd like to echo that from Sam, if you'd like to grab your Bibles, Philippians chapter 3, and let's pray. Father God, we ask as we do open your word now, we do pray that you would help us to heed the warning of this passage, but also rejoice in the promise, and I ask Father that you would enable us to pursue you, to go hard after you, and we ask it for your sake.

Amen. This is a radio conversation between the United States Navy aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October 1995.

Canadians, come on first. Please divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid collision.

Americans, I recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the north to avoid collision.

Canadians, negative. You'll have to divert your course 15 degrees to the south to avoid collision.

Americans, this is the captain of a US Navy warship.

I say again, divert your course. Canadians, no. Americans, this is the aircraft carrier USS Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln, the second largest ship in the United States Atlantic fleet.

[1 : 31] We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers and numerous support vessels. I demand that you change your course 15 degrees north. I say again, that's one five degrees north.

Or countermeasures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship. There's a bit of a pause in the radio conversation at this point. And the Canadians come on.

This is a lighthouse. Your call. There are a number of points in the Bible where we get similar warnings in order to change course in view of what is up ahead in the future.

And Philippians 3 is one of those passages which has a clear warning in there. Amongst the encouragement, there is a clear warning.

This is the fourth installment in our commitment series, Partners for Life. The title of this talk is Partners for Eternity. However, late last night I decided to change it. And I've called it Partners in Going Hard After God.

[2 : 37] From Philippians 3, I want to show you why we must go hard after God. And I want to encourage you to go hard after God. And I want to persuade you that the pursuit of God is not optional, even after conversion.

For this passage is written to Christians. The warning is to Christians. I take it those Paul describes in verse 18 as living as enemies of the cross of Christ are those who have given up going hard after God.

They are the ones who have given up, pressing forward, pursuing God. You see, this is a warning that Paul has issued before and he does it here again. He says it with tears because verse 19 says that the destiny of the enemy of the cross of Christ is destruction.

He could not have used stronger language in issuing this warning. The destruction that he has in mind here is eternal destruction. And that is why we must go hard after God.

Because the warning is clear. The destiny you don't want to mess with. Paul says three things about the enemy of the cross of Jesus.

[4 : 00] He says their lives are characterized by three things. It says here that they have their mind on earthly things. Literally, their mind is set on earthly things. It's not just they think about them, but they're actually set on earthly things.

At the very center of their life is the world and its thinking and its priorities. They think like the world thinks. Their thinking is not directed by the word of God, the Bible, but by popular culture, by social trends, by what everyone else is doing and thinking.

When there is a clash between the scriptures and popular influences, the Bible loses out every time for these people. Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter?

Very strong warning. When Peter had his mind on earthly things and tried to discourage Jesus from going to the cross. You remember that encounter? Jesus turned to his best mate and called him the name of his worst enemy.

Get behind me, Satan. Why? Because you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.

[5 : 13] Your mind is on earthly things. You are thinking like everyone else thinks. Peter wanted Jesus without a cross, but a Jesus without a cross is no savior and he's no lord.

The enemy of the cross has their mind set on earthly things. It also says that they glory in their shame. The very sins that Jesus died for on the cross are the very things that they continue to do and they continue to delight in.

They may even call themselves Christians, but they don't live it. It's like as if those sins don't matter. To glory in shame is to keep doing the very things that God hates and think it doesn't matter.

It's even to have a strong confidence in that I am saved by grace alone and Jesus is just going to keep forgiving me. And my sin doesn't matter.

It is a blasé approach to holiness. The technical term for it is cheap grace. It's a blasé approach to the mortification of sin.

[6 : 17] It's to glory in shame. Of course these people would tick the box on the big sins and go, well, you know, I don't do those things. List off the Ten Commandments, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, all fine and dandy.

But what about the acceptable sins? God wants to deal with those things that we find acceptable amongst us. God wants to deal with those things.

When you go hard after God, those stones get turned over and God wants to deal with them. It is painful and it is raw to allow God to weed around in those closely held sins because the life of sin is so easy.

It is so attractive. It feels so good. But be warned. Destiny is destruction.

It also says that the enemy of God has their stomach as their God. That is, their gut is their God. What that means is they pander their physical desires and urges.

[7 : 41] What I feel like doing is what I do. What I want to do is what I do. And so the words of Jesus for these people, where he says, deny yourself, take up your cross and come follow me, those words have been forgotten.

They have come to Christ, but don't want to keep denying themselves. The enemy of the cross of Christ has destruction as their destiny.

Friends, the cross of Christ is where the war on God ended. It is where Jesus dealt with our sin, forgave our sin, forgave our rebellion.

And it is only, only through Jesus that we are ever able to escape the destiny of destruction. So why go hard after God in Christ?

Because destruction is the destiny of those who don't. And do you hear the warning of this passage? It's not just saying, yeah, I trust in Jesus, I believe in Jesus.

[8 : 52] And leaving it at that. It is going hard after God because he's gone hard after me. Moment by moment, day by day, week after week, month after month, year after year.

We also get another reason why we should go hard after God in verse 20. But our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

The alternative destination is citizenship of heaven, where the Lord Jesus reigns. And that is why we should go hard after God. Because it is where Jesus is.

Citizenship is crucial. It is very important. And by and large, it is something that most of us take for granted. It's something we didn't take for granted at the end of last year, when we were pursuing citizenship for some of our members.

Life and death were at stake. That is how important citizenship is. But when you're born in a country like Australia, you just take it for granted.

[10 : 04] Until you go to the United States and then you appreciate it a little bit more. Citizenship is crucial because it provides protection and care and significance.

If you are a refugee, a citizen of no country, and there is no one to protect you, all of a sudden life becomes very, very nervous.

For instance, over 100 years ago, a Spanish court condemned to death a man for a crime that he apparently committed. However, this man was an American citizen and he was British by birth. And the two ambassadors of those respective countries said, you cannot condemn this man to death. The Spanish basically ignored that. And they marched him out to put him up against the wall to kill him by firing squad.

Right behind the firing squad came the ambassadors of those two countries. They walked out with them and they each had a flag and they wrapped the man in one of their respective country flags as he stood there on the wall of the firing squad.

[11 : 22] And the two ambassadors said, we dare you to fire a shot. If you fire a shot, we will bring both of our empires down on top of Spain.

And the guns were lowered and they all walked away. That is what citizenship does for you. There he was standing in front of a bunch of guys with guns aimed at him and he was wrapped in simple cotton and yet he might as well have been wearing armour plating.

He was impervious to destruction. As a friend of the cross, you are impervious to destruction.

Trusting Jesus means that your citizenship is in heaven and your destiny is not destruction.

Instead of destruction, in fact, it's a new body fit for eternity is what it says there. Did you see that? He's not just changing us on the inside, that's what he's doing now, but he's actually going to give us bodies which are completely new, fit for eternity in heaven.

Bodies that don't need to cry. Bodies that won't feel unloved. Bodies that won't feel lonely. Bodies that won't feel sad. Bodies that will never grow tired. Bodies that won't break down on you.

[12 : 47] Notice too that Paul didn't say that your citizenship will be in heaven. It is because Christ has already grabbed hold of you, your citizenship is in heaven. If you're a Christian, you are already a citizen of heaven.

You are already impervious to destruction. That is the home that you are heading for. And that is why the citizen of heaven, who understands that they are a citizen of heaven, don't just wait.

They eagerly wait. They eagerly wait for their saviour to come. We are eagerly busting to be there because it's where Jesus is.

Verses 12 to 16 show us what this eagerly waiting looks like. And let me say that these verses explode the false logic that says if Christ has found us, we don't need to find him anymore.

We no longer need to seek him if we have been found by Christ. Paul's reasoning is in fact the exact opposite. I press on in order to gain Christ because Christ has already gained me.

[14 : 08] Verse 12, not that I've already obtained all this or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.

One thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things and if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

You see, Paul did not see his conversion to Christ as a cage to hold him back but as a catapult to pursue righteousness.

The irresistible grace of Christ overcoming Paul's rebellion did not make Paul passive. It made him powerful in pursuing holiness.

[15 : 15] The best commentary on these verses I think is back in chapter 2, verses 12 and 13 which says, work out your salvation. Work at it, work at it, work at it. Why? Because it is God who is working in you.

In calling Christians to go hard after God, Paul in no way undermines salvation by grace alone.

He simply confirms it. Twice in these verses he affirms it is God who has taken hold of him. But in the very same verses he calls us to take hold of Christ, to pursue, to press on, go hard after God.

You see what Paul's saying here? Our work in pursuing God is his work for his glory when done in dependence on his sovereign grace.

I'll say that again. Our work is his work for his glory when done in dependence on his sovereign grace.

[16 : 36] The most fundamental reason why the Christian must go hard after Christ is that Christ is in them moving them to go hard after him.

And it's in this that Paul sets himself up as a model to follow in verse 17. He says, follow my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern that we gave you. What was the pattern of life for Paul?

Verse 10, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow to attain the resurrection from the dead.

What was Paul's pattern of life? I just want to know Jesus and I want to be like Jesus. His whole focus in life was being made more and more like Jesus until the day he meets Jesus face to face. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain is what he said in chapter 1 verse 21. It is a spurious logic which insists that if we have found Christ we no more need to seek Christ.

[17 : 55] As one writer put it last century, to have found God and still to pursue him is the soul's paradox of love. Scorned indeed by the two easily satisfied religiousists but justified in happy experience by the children with a burning heart.

Or put probably more simply by another guy who was even older than him wherever there is true grace there is a desire for more grace.

grace. Wherever there is true grace there is a desire for more grace. The evidence that you have Christ is that you want more of Christ.

Continued indifference to growth in grace is a sign of no grace and that my friends is why we need to go hard after God. Because either you're a citizen of heaven or the warning is destruction is your destiny.

So what can we learn from Paul's example? How do we go hard after God? I think there's at least three things in this passage.

[19 : 19] Firstly develop holy dissatisfaction. That's the first thing. Paul says here, brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.

Paul's pursuit of Christ rises out of a profound dissatisfaction with the way he is. And I just ponder this.

Could it be that there is a connection between how little earnest pursuit of God there is today and how much we are told to think well of ourselves?

It's not a topic that I haven't raised before. It is a wonderful thing to have been taken possession by Christ but it is a thousand times more wonderful when we realise that he has taken possession of people who remain sinful.

people. The first step in going hard after the holy God then is to develop a holy dissatisfaction with your spiritual life.

[20 : 26] What comes more naturally to us however is a dissatisfaction with other people's spiritual life. That is a more natural thing. It is very easy to point the finger and say well that person doesn't come to church very often and that person's never involved and that person's always got excuses and that person doesn't pray so clearly and dissatisfaction dissatisfaction dissatisfaction all around me.

Disappointment all around me. Being able to point out others lack of pursuit of God doesn't actually mean that I am pursuing God.

Just thought I want to make that clear. It is not a sign of maturity to be able to identify other people's immaturity. Stand in front of the mirror of the word and recognize that you have not yet arrived.

The hearty admission of our spiritual imperfections is the starting point for the pursuit of God. The mortification of pride friends. I think I have spoken about that a few times.

That is where it begins. I think that real humbling guilt is extraordinarily rare. And I think that 99% of our bad feelings about ourselves is actually rooted in pride.

[21 : 53] For example, suppose you go to a dinner party and you discover that you've turned up with the wrong gear on. You haven't dressed appropriately for the occasion. You then knock your coffee over on the table.

The joke you attempt to make falls flat. you call your host by the wrong name, you tread on his dog's tail and you make the kids cry. You go away from that and how do you feel?

You feel rotten. You feel rotten. Who's ever done that, by the way? Anyone? Yeah. A few people. Yeah, you feel rotten.

You hate yourself, you're depressed, you don't want to show your face. Where do all these depressing, immobilizing, self-denouncing feelings come from? Is the answer God's offended glory

or your offended pride?

People who are depressed and immobilized and angry because their behavior has injured, has actually injured the glory of God are very, very, very rare.

[23 : 03] But people who are depressed and immobilized and angry because their behavior has prevented them from having a reputation of being social, intelligent and competent are very, very, very common.

When I call us to develop a holy dissatisfaction with our spiritual life, I am asking for something rare, not something common. I am asking us to feel worse that we possess so little of Christ that we have such little communion with God.

The first step in going hard after God is to feel bad about the right things. Friends, develop a holy dissatisfaction with your spiritual life. The second step is going hard after God, I think, is in verse 13, to forget those things which lie behind.

I take this to mean that anything in your or our collectively as a church, our background which hinders the pursuit of God should be put out of our minds. The point is this.

The point is don't ever look back. The point is only look back for the sake of pressing forward. And generally churches are not good at that.

[24 : 24] We like looking back. And the longer we look back, the more likely we will become a museum. We ought only ever look back for the sake of pressing forward.

Never, ever substitute nostalgia for hope. Individually and corporately, we must be careful of looking back, my friends.

Memories of successes in the past can make us smug and self-satisfied. Memories of failures in the past can make us hopeless and paralyzed in the pursuit of God in the present.

Never look back like that. Give humble thanks for the successes from the past. Rejoice that God has done some great stuff in the past.

But friends, it's in the past. We ought not take comfort that my current pursuit of God is somehow wrapped up with something that I did 20 years ago.

[25 : 27] God wants it now. He wants the pursuit now. Never make, and also linked with that, make humble confession for failure.

But then turn to the future and go hard after God now. Which brings me to my final step in going hard after God.

Verse 13, strain forward to what lies ahead. strain forward. It is hard work is the idea. You are straining to move forward. And Paul provides his own illustration of straining forward in 1 Corinthians 9.

Let me read it to you. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly. I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

[26 : 37] During the marathon in the 1968 Mexican Olympics, a Tanzanian runner, Stephen Akwari, fell and badly hurt his leg.

He had blood coming out everywhere and they bandaged it up and all that. he actually got up and he limped the rest of the race. And he finally finished one and a half hours after the last person had crossed the finish line.

And there was virtually no one in the stands. They were packing up for the day. Marathon's over, the lights are getting turned off, there's a guy sweeping the floors, they put the cat out, all that sort of stuff.

It's time to shut the shop down for the day. There's a reporter packing up. He sees what's happened because there's a few people that are left in the stands are actually standing and applauding this guy, limping around in the twilight.

And this reporter runs down to the finish line and sticks a microphone in his face and said, why don't you just give up? My goodness, it's all over. Look at your leg.

[27 : 46] You've still got blood coming out of it. And he said this, I imagine with a bit of puffing and panning, you don't understand, my country did not send me 5,000 miles to start a race.

They sent me to finish it. They sent me to finish it. The way to go hard after God is with all the discipline and self-denial of an athlete.

I doubt that there has ever been a Christian who reached the heights of knowledge and joy and obedience and communion with God without a plan and discipline and self-denial.

God does not promise his riches to aimless, apathetic, lazy servants. Paul did not run aimlessly or beat the air.

He lived with spiritual goals in view and controlled his passions for the sake of those goals. Can you see the difference? The destiny of destruction are those who glory in their shame, who have their minds set on earthly things and give themselves over to worldly passions.

[29 : 11] nations. The citizen of heaven is like an athlete, focused, aiming towards the goal. So I would encourage you, my friends, I would urge you, in fact I would plead with you to be athletes, in spiritual athletes, to set yourself a goal to know more of the word of God, to grasp more of the will of God and to love more of the wonder of God.

God, make a plan right now as you look into the next year, make a plan right now, a plan of prayer and study and worship and service and go for it with all of your might because it is Christ working in you, dragging you heavenward.

Heed the warning this morning, develop a holy dissatisfaction with your spiritual attainments. put out of your mind anything from the past which hinders your pursuit of God in the present.

Strain forward like an athlete, for it is God who is work in you. We do not run in our own strength and all the more, therefore, we can be assured that going after, hard after the holy God will bring us to know him deeply and enjoy the sweet, sweet confirmation of our citizenship in heaven.

Let's pray. Father God, again, your word is so clear and yet without your spirit enlightening, Father, it just does not make sense.

[30 : 58] our hearts are darkened to the glorious truth of citizenship in heaven where the Lord Jesus rules. Father, our hearts are weak and they are feeble.

There are many things that we just, it's just so much easier, Lord, just to be able to sit and to be comfortable and yet, Lord, when we do it for too long, we just get comfortable with religion and we get comfortable in our apathy.

And so, Lord, we pray that you would rescue us from that. Father, rescue us, we pray. Rescue us, Father, so that we might go hard after you and enjoy the sweet confirmation of our citizenship in heaven where the Lord Jesus Christ reigns and from where he will come to establish his rule and to take us heavenward to be with him.

Lord, give us that focus and that desire now to go hard after you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.