

Pressing On

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[0 : 00] back together to a reading in Philippians chapter 3. We're going to look at verse 12 to verse 16. Just to get it in context we can read again at verse 10.

That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 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 is behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.

I press on towards 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 through to what we have attained.

As we look at these verses what we find is Paul in many ways examining himself and looking at his life and where he is, what he had, what it was worth and what he needed in his life.

As you read from the beginning of the chapter you see he's going through what he once was. We've looked at this in the past, the start of chapter 3. How he thought he was on the right track, how he thought he was doing everything right to please God in his own eyes and yet all the time he was on the wrong path entirely, heading in completely the wrong way.

[1 : 48] But what changed for him? What great change happened in his life? Well he tells us in these verses that we've read in verse 12. Because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Another version of that word translation would be Christ Jesus has taken hold of me. So this is the great change that has happened in his life.

Everything that he saw as righteousness by himself, he now sees as just filthy rags, rubbish, compared to the righteousness that there is in Christ through faith.

And so this is what has changed in him. And as we look at ourselves, as we think of ourselves, here we are, the last Wednesday meeting of this year.

As we think looking back over the year that's gone and God willing looking ahead to the year that's about to come our way. It's often a time when we reflect and look on ourselves.

[2 : 56] And wonder just where we are. And any examination of ourselves probably always leave us, maybe should always leave us, feeling that there's always room for improvement.

We are not perfect. None of us. And that's what Paul says here in verse 12. Not that I have already obtained this, or I'm already perfect.

He doesn't see him as the perfect Christian in any way, shape or form. But what he says is, I press on. I press on.

And so that's what we are to do as well. We as a people are to be a people who recognise we're not perfect, recognise how often we fall short in so many ways, but to take heart through these words too and to press on.

So whether we're looking back as to what has gone, looking at where we are in the present situation, or whether we're looking ahead, God willing, to what lies ahead of us, that we take this from Paul himself to us.

[4 : 06] We press on. We may often say this time of year, well, things are going to be different.

I'm going to change my life. Starting the 1st of January, I'm going to start doing things differently. We can all have our great plans, but how many of them last?

January is often the time of year when most people join a gym. They think we're going to start the year in a new way. Join a gym, get healthy, get fit.

By the end of January, 50% of those who have joined a gym will have cancelled their membership. They don't keep going. They don't press on. They can't get into it.

They almost can't be bothered with it. It's too much like hard work. But here, Paul is speaking about the Christian in this sense of our physical strength as well.

[5 : 11] He's talking about this in the way of being an athlete. Pressing on towards the goal. Pressing on towards the prize that is before us.

Like someone who is running a race. And when we think of our lives and the things that we would long to change, what is it that we would want to change most about ourselves?

If you look at Paul and the way his life has changed, what is it that he is pressing on towards? To be more like Christ.

And to recognise in all of his shortcomings, he's not obtained it, he's not already perfect, but this is what he is pressing on towards. And for ourselves, as we examine our lives just now, as we, God willing, go into a new season in our lives, our attitude could be one of so easily just to be like those who join a gym, but less than a month later, they've given up.

We could have that kind of attitude as well. But instead, we are to have this attitude of Paul. And to live in this race.

[6 : 32] This race that the Lord has set out before each of us. Going it individually, going it collectively, but running this race, pressing on towards the goal.

There are several places in the New Testament where the Christian life is looked at in this way. Very often, it's Paul himself who's looking at it, whether it's in Corinthians, Timothy, Hebrews. You find this illustration of running the race with patience, pressing on, straining towards the goal. And so here, he is again in Philipians, writing to them here, this letter of joy as it's described. He's writing to them to press on, to strain towards the goal, the joy that there is in Christ, and seeking to be more like him.

And in so doing, he gives us some principles, if you like, for spiritual growth. things that we can put into our practice in our own lives. Using the athletic analogy, he's going to speak about how to get in shape spiritually, how to keep ourselves fit in the Christian life, and pressing on towards that goal, and pressing on in the race set before us.

[7 : 54] And the first principle is this, be in the race. Be in the race.

If you think of the analogy of a race, a sporting event, there's a slogan that's often spoken of and true for every competitor.

You have to be in it to win it. And here, Paul is reminding the church at Philippi of the race that they are to be in.

Not to get sidelined into something else, but to be in the race that the Lord has set before them.

Because even if you just look at Paul's own life, what race was Paul in?

He wasn't just running this race to find forgiveness for his past. He wasn't keeping running this race just because of all that he had done wrong in the past.

[8 : 58] He wasn't running this race to make himself look good towards others, to please others. He is running this race for a real purpose.

The purpose that we read of in verse 10 and 11. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings becoming like him in his death that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

This is the race that he is in. Striving to be more Christ-like. How do you know if you are growing in grace?

How do you look at yourself and think, maybe many of us probably don't think it, but how would you recognise if you are growing in grace? Well, it's maybe easier to answer to recognise how you're not growing in grace.

If you think you've arrived, if you think you've made it, if you think you have everything you need now and you will cease to grow in the Lord.

[10 : 16] You're not pressing on towards the goal to be more like him. If you ever come to that point where you think that's it, well, you're no longer growing in grace.

And so by the same token, when you're willing to admit that you need to humble yourself before God, when you're willing to admit that there are things that could be better in your life, areas that you need to grow, that is a sign that you're still pressing on.

Pressing on towards the goal, just as Paul is saying here. Not that I've already obtained it, not that I'm already perfect, but I press on.

I press on. I keep going. I recognise the race that the Lord has set before me and I will run it with him. I will run this race with patience, with my eyes fixed on Jesus.

We are to be in this race, not to become complacent or forgetful or to think I cannot get any better, I cannot improve.

[11:28] There's always areas where we can be better. There's a car bumper sticker. I've not seen it in any cars here, but I've seen it advertised. And it says this, Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven.

Now there's elements of truth in that, of course there is. But there's a danger in it as well. You have that in your car and you're going flying past other motorists or cutting in on them and they're seeing that on your car.

What kind of Christian is that? And this is some kind of excuse that you can maybe give. Well, Christians aren't perfect, but we're forgiven. That's not the way it is at all.

That would be the danger of just becoming complacent in our lives and thinking, well, I'm not perfect, but at least I'm forgiven. And the danger is we just do as we please, knowing, well, the Lord's going to forgive me anyway.

Instead of being convicted in sin, we just carry on in sin. And that's the danger that Paul is addressing here in Philippi and in other churches throughout his day as well.

[12:43] He was addressing this danger that people just start slipping back into their old ways. They forget that the race that the Lord has set before them and they just go and live for themselves.

So instead of placing on to be more Christ-like, we can just say, well, I'm not going to be perfect anyway. So let's just leave it at that. But by having that kind of attitude, we're forgetting the very reason why Christ came.

We're now in playing what the Lord Jesus has done for us. Because as he says here, I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Having this mind, he recognizes what Christ has done for him. And so, he's encouraging us to be a people like this as well.

There are a lot of people trying to run the race for themselves instead of running for the Lord. And just look at how Paul thought he was doing everything right.

[13:54] Verse 4 to verse 6 of this chapter which we read, he says, I have every reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence, I have more.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel. And so he goes on. He had all of these things going for him. All of these things that he thought, this is me running the race.

He was sincere. He was dedicated. He was zealous in so many ways. But there was one major problem. He was not running for Christ.

He was not running looking to him. He was running for himself. To be seen by others and the greatness of all of these things, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, all of these things but not running for Christ.

But now he says, I press on to make it my own. Why? Because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

[15:06] And we have to just understand what these words mean. Have you ever been arrested? Well, if you are a Christian, you have been.

Not in the sense of the police laying their hands on you and putting you in cuffs. But that's what Paul describes here of what Christ Jesus has done for him.

Christ Jesus has taken hold of me is another translation. Others say he has apprehended me. It's a very word for being arrested.

Taken hold of by Christ. That's what's changed in Paul's life. This is what has brought him into the right race. This is what is keeping him going.

This is what is making him focus on what lies ahead. Pressing on towards this goal. It is because Christ Jesus has arrested me.

[16:09] Too many Christians today are resisting arrest. Resisting Christ taking hold of them because of what it means. Because of all it entails.

Christ Jesus being all in all for us. But Paul is reminding us here to press on towards that goal.

Not resisting but allowing Christ to transform us fully. This means as we are arrested by Christ we are no longer our own. We belong to Christ.

He has bought us with a price. And so our aim is to please him. So the first thing is to be in the right race.

To be running for Christ. Taking hold of by him and going forward for him. The second principle we see here is don't be distracted.

[17 : 14] he says there in verse 13 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 towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul could so easily have been distracted in this race. He could so easily have felt that he didn't even deserve to be in the race. And there's two ways that he describes the distractions that he has here.

He speaks about the past. Forgetting what lies behind. We have all failed in the past.

We've all fallen short of God's goals in our lives. But Paul looking at his own life he sees himself as failing in so many ways in his past.

But what he doesn't let happen is that past to distract him. He says I'm not going to be constantly affected by it. I'm not going to be constantly held back or held down by my past.

[18 : 32] What he says is the pressing on is not being distracted by that but going forward forgetting what is behind.

Not in the sense where it's all completely gone. He knows it's there. But he doesn't allow it to take his focus away. Just like an athlete in a race.

If an athlete in a race is distracted by what's behind, if there's other athletes and the athlete's wondering how close are they behind me, if they start to look behind, they're going to fall away.

They're going to lose their focus. And so Paul is saying here you fix your eyes forward. You realise what's behind you but you press on.

And the same is true for ourselves as well. We are to press forward. Yes we know we all have things in our past. Maybe even in this past year we look at things and we regret and we wish we hadn't done or we wish we had done.

[19 : 36] But we don't let that hold us back. We don't let that make us feel we're unworthy to go on in this race. But we press forward. We press on to know Christ Jesus and to serve him more.

It's like someone once said if you always drive the car looking in the rear view mirror you're always going to end up in the ditch at some point. You've got to look at what lies ahead.

sometimes we have to just let the past go. Not in the sense of forgetting it completely but not letting it hold us back.

There's another way he warns of not being distracted either. It's not to think that we've made it. Brothers I do not consider that I've made it my own.

He hasn't done it for himself. He could say maybe he's been a Christian for a long time. 20, 25, 30 years a Christian. Maybe even more you could think well that's it.

[20 : 44] I've made it. I've given my part. I've done my bit. It's time to maybe just sit back and take it easy for a while.

But he says no. He's pressing on. He says press on. Keep going. Don't think you've arrived.

Just press on with your eyes fixed on Jesus. What he says then is crucial in this as well. He says I press on towards the goal.

The one thing I do. One thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind and straining towards what lies ahead. I press on. The one thing I do.

Again it's like Paul has this athlete in mind where their focus is on the race. Nothing else. This one thing. Paul was of this mind himself.

[21 : 53] For me to live is Christ. That's what he says says earlier in Philippines. For me to live is Christ. He has this mind in him.

This one thing I do. One of the problems of the modern Christian life indeed all life just now is there's so many things for us.

No one can say this one thing I do. Because we're all trying to do so much. We're pulled in different directions all the time. But Paul is saying refocus.

Refocus. And this one thing is what is needful. To press on towards this prize. This high goal.

This prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. So whatever we do, we do as to the Lord. As it says, Jesus taught himself, seek first the kingdom of God.

[22 : 58] Seek first this one thing. Have this mind, he says. Have this aim in your life. Press on towards this mark.

You could say, we don't do things to please others. Don't do things to please myself. I seek to please God.

And Paul himself could say later on in his life, as he was an older man, as he came to reach this goal in his life, he says in 2 Timothy 4 verse 6 and 7, for I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure has come.

I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. And that is a wonderful testimony for any Christian to have.

I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. faith. That is what Paul is encouraging us to hear in these words to the Philippians.

[24 : 15] That we press on towards the goal. Fight the good fight. Keep the faith. The third and final thing is, the third principle, have the right attitude.

Let those of us in verse 15 who are mature think this way. And if anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

When we think of athletes and sports people, we so often think of the difference that the right attitude makes. The attitude makes a difference between defeat and victory, success and failure.

So often you see maybe an athlete or even teams who lack the same talent as others, but because of the right mindset, because of the right attitude going into it, they come out on top.

Attitude is crucial in sport and Paul is saying it's crucial in our lives too. In the life of the Christian, our attitude is crucial.

[25 : 29] He speaks here so often in this letter of having this right mind. Verse 15, let those of us who are mature think this way.

Have this mind, he's saying there. He said it already in this letter, for example, chapter 2, verse 2, complete my joy by being of the same mind.

Chapter 2, verse 5, have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. The word for mind is used ten times in Philippians.

Nearly half as much as it's used in the New Testament, it's used in this letter, the letter of joy. And so you see here, linked to joy is having this mind, this attitude.

The two go hand in hand. And so Paul, as he's summing up here, would be saying, have this right attitude, have this mind in you, pressing on towards the goal.

[26 : 34] Not seeing this as something that's just, oh, I've just got to try and do it. It's not what I really want to be doing it. It's to have this right attitude, the joy of the Lord, knowing that we are doing it for him, knowing the privilege that is ours, as was said in the prayers this evening as we sang in Psalm 122, I joyed when to the house of God go up they said to me.

I went there with joy. I went there to be with God's people. I went there to be with a praying people, a fellow people, brothers and sisters in Christ.

This right attitude. So whatever we're doing, if we're serving the Lord, it's doing it for him. Not doing something because the ministers asked.

not doing something to try and please others, but doing it as a sense of joy for the Lord. Let those of us who mature think this way.

And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. He is saying, press on in this way. Go forward in this strength, in this right attitude of joy to the Lord.

[27 : 55] It was a story told about when Sir Christopher Wren was constructing cathedrals in London. Not sure how many of the churches in London he built, but there are enormous amount of them were designed and built by Sir Christopher Wren.

And there was people working on these cathedrals, these churches, when they were being built. And it was something that was being spoken about quite a lot in the time.

And a journalist thought that he would go and interview some of the workers that were working on the buildings. And he asked three different people who were working, what is it that you're doing?

The first person he replied to him asked the question, what are you doing? He said, I'm cutting stone for ten shillings a day. second person he asked the same question to, what are you doing? I'm putting in ten hours a day on this job. The third person he asked, what are you doing? He said, I'm helping Christopher Wren construct one of London's greatest cathedrals.

[29 : 13] You see the difference in the attitude. One saw it as working for money. One saw it as just a hard day's labour, ten hours, but one had a greater vision, a better vision, a vision that encouraged going on and gave them an attitude that was right for going forward.

I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren construct one of London's greatest cathedrals. So what's our attitude and service for the Lord? Are we thinking to ourselves just putting in a ten-hour day here?

Are we thinking to ourselves I'm just putting my money into this and nothing else? Or do we see it as being involved in the kingdom of God? I am serving the Lord with all my heart that his kingdom may be built and come in power here.

Attitude makes such a difference. So Paul is saying to us here in all of these principles be in the right race.

See yourselves as running for Christ. Don't be distracted as you go on. Don't let the past or the present hold you back but press on towards the goal.

[30 : 42] And then finally just see who you are doing it for. See that this is all for Christ. We are part of his kingdom.

We are part of his church. And we have that promise that his church will be built. So let's not be discouraged. But let's go forward pressing on encouraged with the right attitude with the right mindset that God can and will do great things for us as we look to him and trust in him.

May God bless his word to us. We are going to sing in conclusion to God's praise in Psalm 119.

It's the Sing Psalms version, page 159, verse 33. Psalm 119 at verse 33. Teach me to follow your decrees, and I will keep them to the end.

Give insight, and I'll keep your law, with all my heart to it attend. We'll sing this section, verse 33 to 40, to God's praise. teach me to follow your decrees, then I will keep them to the end.

[32 : 22] give in give in sight, and I'll keep your law, with all my heart to it attain.

lead me in your commandment path, for then, O Lord, delight I find, word high, hypersive, lift me toward my eyes, regardless of O turn my eyes from worthless things, give life according to your word.

To meet your servant, keep your pledge, so that you may be feared, O Lord.

Remove from me the shame, my friend.

Your laws excel in a bright red.

[34 : 32] O how I long for your dequese.

Preserve me in your righteousness. Amen. Now may grace, mercy and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.