

Guest Speaker Drew Williams

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Thank you for letting us come and be a part of what's going on here.

As we were driving down, I was just thinking, in a church plant, it can feel like, well, it's not as big or as flashy as what some people are used to, but I want to encourage you that being a part of this church plant, you are at the epicenter of God's activity in the world.

So when Jesus sent his disciples out into the world, he said, go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. And then the book of Acts shows how that happens. How is this mission to go into all the world and make disciples going to happen?

The book of Acts says it's through church planting. It's through new churches coming together, congregating like this on a normal Sunday, worshiping the Lord, praying to him, singing with one another, and preaching God's word.

[1 : 26] So you, it doesn't feel like much is happening when we're gathering together, but Jesus Christ is present with us and his mission is going forth through your faithful service.

So if we could just come and be with you guys for a Sunday to sing, that would be enough. It would be enough to just come and be a part of what God's doing here. So thank you so much for what you're sacrificing to be here to serve.

It's all hands on deck. From the moment we pulled in the parking lot, a young man was coming out with an umbrella, escorting us into the church.

And so we're just so grateful to be here. Another reason we're grateful is just what Walt and Kim have meant to us. He already said about seven and a half years ago, after Rev was born and right after my wife, Maria, was born again and became a Christian, she started babysitting for Walt and Kim.

And they disciplined her and cared for her. And then when I came into the picture, they welcomed me in as well. And I think that was probably necessary. I don't think there was much of an option you had there.

[2 : 36] I guess you could have said no and you don't like me or something like that. Yeah, but it's hard to overstate the impact that Walt and Kim have had on us.

Through years of sitting in their living room, watching their children, but also watching them love one another, care for their kids, live out the implications of the gospel in their life has made such an impact on us.

So I want to encourage you that your pastor, he's a pastor from the pulpit, but he's also a pastor who cares for his people and he cares for us.

So you're following a man worth following. So again, thanks for letting us be here with you. And now let's turn our attention to God's word.

So we're going to be in Philippians, continuing your series in Philippians, All of Christ for All of Life. Turn to Philippians chapter 3, verses 12 through 16.

[3 : 46] Today we'll see that all of Christ is sufficient for growth in the Christian life. Philippians 3, verses 12 through 16.

And listen as I have the privilege of reading God's holy word, the only perfect word you'll hear today. Not that I've 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've 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 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 it's finally March, which although the weather doesn't suggest it today, spring is coming.

[4 : 59] I don't know what your favorite part about spring is, but even as we were driving down, so we're in Louisville, Kentucky right now, which is quite a bit colder than here.

And it's not, the weather's been tough on us. But as we're driving down, you could see trees blooming on the way. So I love, I love spring. I love seeing the trees bloom.

I love seeing the birds chirp, hearing the birds chirp. It seems like people are just happier when springtime comes, doesn't it? People are not so cranky in the office or in the home.

You can get outside. But in the Williams household, one reason for spring trumps all, and it's that baseball season is on the way. I'm one of the growing minority who still claims baseball as his favorite sport, especially in my generation.

Basketball may be faster. Football may have more action. But there's nothing like slowing down on a Sunday afternoon and watching baseball. Ever since I was little, I grew up in Ottawa, not far from here, and baseball has been a big part of my life.

[6 : 09] One thing that's interesting about baseball is that, and unlike other major sports, if you're selected to play professional baseball, you don't go straight to the major leagues.

You don't go straight to fame and fortune and being on TV. You go to the minor leagues. Traveling from cheap hotel to cheap hotel, cheap restaurant to cheap restaurant.

Even, I don't know if you guys follow baseball, but Bryce Harper, he just signed a 13-year, \$330 million deal, which I think is more money than any of us know what we would do with.

But even he spent two years in the minor leagues before coming up to the major leagues. So the idea is that nobody is ready. Nobody's ready right away for the big leagues.

It doesn't matter how athletic you are or how skilled you are. Every player who's picked needs to improve. They need to grow. They need to make progress before they make it to the major leagues.

[7 : 11] And the one thing that each of these players is dreaming for, every little kid who grows up playing baseball dreams for the day of getting the call up to the big leagues. The day when the major leagues will call them and say, you're ready.

Come and join the team. But until then, until that day comes, it means there's growth to be had. It means there's progress to be made. It means it's time to press on, to get in the cage, get in the weight room, and work.

And grow. So what our text teaches us today is that the Christian life is similar to this. We too are people waiting on a future call.

Paul says he's waiting on the day of resurrection in verse 11. The day when Jesus will come and be with us forever.

But until that day comes, we press on to grow. So did you notice in our text, three times Paul uses the language of progress.

[8 : 15] He says, He's calling the Philippians and he's calling us today to adopt this mindset of growth, to press on, to mature.

So the main point today, where we're going is this. In light of our sure and future hope, let's press on to maturity in the Christian life.

So in light of our sure and future hope, let's press on to maturity in the Christian life. So wherever you're at in your walk with Jesus today, whether you've been a Christian for 30 years or 30 days, this passage is pushing us farther in and farther up into the Christian life.

So our text gives us three gospel-rooted strategies for pursuing growth in the Christian life. Three strategies. First strategy, remember Christ's work.

So look down with me in verse 12. Not that I've already obtained this or I'm already perfect, but I press on to make it my own. Why?

[9 : 29] Why does he press on? Because Christ Jesus has made me his own. The first strategy is remember Christ's work. Remember Christ's work.

So in this verse, Paul's remembering his conversion story. He remembers how there was a time in his life when he was going from house to house, dragging off men and women and imprisoning them for the faith.

But now he's going house to house, proclaiming the gospel. So he remembers how Jesus intervened in his life and changed everything. And interestingly, this word in verse 12, press on this phrase.

In the original language, it's the same word in verse 6 for persecutor. So Paul's saying just as zealously as he persecuted the church before he became a Christian, now he's pressing on with that same intensity to maturity in the Christian life.

With the same passion and energy he used against the church and against Christ, now he's using it for Christ and for the church. Christ Jesus made me his own.

[10:45] And I love the phrase he uses to say that. Christ Jesus made me his own. The sense is that Christ took possession of him. That's what becoming a Christian is.

It's not so much making a decision or walking down an aisle. When you become a Christian, it's a moment in your life when Christ takes possession of you. And he changes your desires.

He changes your aim in life. Maybe, like Paul, you had some ambition that drove your life before. But when you become a Christian, it changes.

And Jesus becomes your ambition in life. So this is the foundation of the Christian life. And this is the foundation of growth in the Christian life. Eugene Peterson paraphrases it this way.

He says, I reach out to Christ who has so wondrously reached out to me. And that's the Christian life, isn't it? We reach out to Christ. We reach out to growth because Christ reached out to us.

[11:48] It's not like a relay race. Have you guys ever watched a relay race where there's a runner going behind and he hands the baton off to the next person and then they run on?

Sometimes we can think about the Christian life like that. Like Jesus, yeah, he's done the work in the past. He's died for our sins. But now he's handed us the baton and it's our turn to run forward. But that's not how the Christian life works. His saving work is always behind us, is always pushing us forward. It's always causing us to grow and keep running.

It's almost as if the runner left you from being behind, you'd be toast. There'd be no way to keep running. So it's Christ's work that propels us. So the gospel, it's what saves us and it's also what presses us on to keep going.

I've recently been reading this book by Milton Vinson. It's called A Gospel Primer. And it's an excellent book. He talks about how the gospel is not just for what gets us saved, but it's actually what we need every day as a Christian.

[12:55] I think we have a quote of that up here for you. Yeah, so it says this. God did not give us his gospel just so we can embrace it and be converted. Actually, he offers it to us every day as a gift that keeps on giving us everything we need for life and godliness.

I've also found that when I'm absorbed in the gospel, everything else I'm supposed to be toward God and toward others seems to flow out of me more naturally and passionately.

His point is simple but profound is that the gospel is the key to salvation and it's the key to Christian growth. We reach out to Christ to grow because he's reached out to us.

In college, I studied soil science, which I know always gets a chuckle, gets a laugh, but I grew up on a farm in Ottawa. And do I?

Yeah. Walt has something smart to say, probably. But I grew up on a farm in Ottawa and then went to Knoxville and studied soil science. I wanted to either go back and be a farmer and go and help farmers.

[14:03] So I feel very at home in Athens, to say the least. It's wonderful here. But one thing I learned is that what really counts for a healthy crop, what really leads to a healthy field, is healthy soil underneath the surface.

You can produce a lot of food quickly by throwing fertilizer on the ground and crops will spring up really quickly. But if the soil is not healthy underneath the ground, eventually the crops are going to die.

It may be a generation. It may be a couple generations. But eventually, eventually the field is going to deteriorate in health. The farm will stop producing. It's the same in the Christian life.

The gospel is the soil underneath the Christian life. It's all of the implications of our life flow from this. So do you want to grow in love for someone who is hard to love in your life?

Set your mind on God's undeserved love for you displayed at the cross. Do you want to grow in patience with your kids as we were just praying? Set your mind on God's patience with you.

[15 : 20] The gospel is the soil beneath all our religious activity. It's why we're here this morning. We can't talk about it enough. Listen to how Deuteronomy 6, 20-23 explains this very point.

Deuteronomy 6 says, When your son asks you in time to come, what is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?

Then you shall say to your son, We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. So the point is, when your son tugs you on the shirt and says, Daddy, why are we going to church today?

Why do we read our Bible at night? Why do we pray? Why do we watch some TV shows but not others? Why do we live a certain way and do these things?

The answer is not, These things are right and these things are wrong. The answer is that Jesus has changed our life and taken possession of us. Because of his work on the cross, we love him.

[16 : 25] We go to church to celebrate his work. We pray for each other and speak kindly to each other because of Christ's kindness with us. This idea of remembering the gospel, of remembering your conversion, it's something that's really stuck out to me in my time at the pastor's college.

So the leaders of Sovereign Grace, the men who founded the movement and who are preaching and leading, the trait that sticks out to me most about them are they're men who have never forgotten what Christ has done in their life.

Whether they're preaching or teaching or leading worship, when they start talking about their conversion, it's like it happened yesterday. The tears start to come down.

People start jumping on the stage and singing loud. There's passion because there's a sense of, Jesus has changed my life. And I want to be like that.

Don't you want to be like that this morning? Don't you want to be someone who's marked by the grace of God? Who's changed by what Jesus has done? So that question I want to ask is, do we remember this morning?

[17 : 36] Do we remember how when we were walking away from Christ, just like Paul, when we had our heart set on something else, when we were on our hell-bound race, Christ came for us.

If you want to grow in the Christian life this morning, if you want to be more mature, that's the first step. This is the most important step, is to remember what Christ has done.

So that's strategy number one. Remember Christ's work. Strategy number two is forget your distractions. Forget your distractions.

So look with me 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.

So now remember, Paul's using the same language of, I haven't made it yet. I need to progress. I need to grow in the Christian life. He's still running.

[18 : 47] He's still pressing on. He wants to love Christ more and more. And when you think about it, it's amazing. This is a man who's been a Christian for probably 30 years at this point. He's planted, he's planted tens of churches.

Walt's only planted one church so far. He's planted tens of churches, but he has this mindset of, I haven't made it yet. I haven't arrived.

I'm pressing on. And one strategy to do this is he's forgetting his distractions and pressing ahead.

The imagery in this text is of a runner running a race, refusing to look to the right or the left.

It doesn't matter what's going on beside him or behind him. He's pressing on. He's like a horse coming out of the gate with blinders on its eyes. You notice that? When horses run, they keep blinders on their eyes because the jockey doesn't want the horse to be distracted about what's going on beside or behind him.

The blinders only let the horse see one thing, what's right in front of them, where they're going. For Paul, forgetting what lies behind means forgetting his old life in Judaism, forgetting his success as an apostle, neither shame about his past sin or pride about his present success and accomplishments fills his mind.

[20 : 13] He forgets these things so that he can see Christ and run after him with resolute purpose. So what about you? What are the weed-like distractions growing in your life this morning?

Or even as you're sitting there right now, what are the distractions in your mind keeping you from growth? Maybe like Paul, yeah, maybe you're like Paul and you're tempted to think, well, I've run the race for a while now and I think I'm just going to kind of coast in to glory.

I've made sufficient progress in the race. Why are you taking this growth stuff so seriously? Maybe you're the exact opposite and shame for past sin distracts you this morning.

You come in here and you think you've messed it up too bad to make any progress in your life.

Maybe a divorce or an abortion that nobody knows about that you just, you wake up every day and think, the Lord holds this against me and I can't grow.

Maybe you made a bad decision that's affected your life and other people's lives and you feel like you can't grow or become more godly because you've already blown it.

[21 : 41] Shame, for you, maybe shame and guilt are like voices in your ears each day as you wake up and each night as you go to bed.

Or maybe, maybe it's fear of the future that distracts you this morning. What if I end up alone? What if nobody really likes me?

What if this suffering and these trials never end? What if another month goes by without getting the job?

What will everyone think of me? What will we do? And this is a question I often have. What if all of my what ifs aren't answered the way I want them to be?

So shame and fear are just two of the weeds that grow in our life threatening to choke out our growth. And Paul this morning calls us to forget them. The Lord calls us to cut them out of our life.

[22 : 41] But how? It's not so easy to just come in and say, okay, I know I need to get rid of these things, but how do we do it? What's the strategy? Well, in our verse, it tells us he's pressing on, straining forward to what lies ahead.

The call is to set our eyes on what's in front of us. It's a fight to see Jesus. Just as the gospel is the soil of our growth, seeing Jesus' glory again and again is like the sunshine and the rain.

It's our daily food. It's what we need more than anything else this morning. So maybe you're here and you're battling shame for past sin. What you need most is not a boost of self-esteem or some bare-knuckle resolution never to sin again.

What you need to see is the glory of Christ's cross. What you need to see is that every reason you have for shame died on the cross with Christ.

He became shamed on the cross for you in your place. What you need to believe is what Richard Sibb said when he said there's more mercy in Christ than sin in us.

[24 : 05] Maybe you're here this morning as a non-Christian or you're here and you've been out of church for a while and you look around and you see everyone who's full of joy and raising their hands and singing and you just think I don't belong here.

They have it all together. Their family is figured out. Our family, we don't have anything figured out. Friend, no one here has it together but we serve the Savior who has it all figured out.

So if you're not a Christian this morning the invitation for you is not to clean up your life. The invitation for you is not to get it all figured out. The invitation for you is to come to Christ who has it all together.

So if you're battling with fear of the future what you need most is not to have all your circumstances figured out. You don't need to have your 401k set and perfect.

what you need to see is Jesus on his throne. You need to see that the king reigns for your good.

The wonderful thing about seeing Christ in his glory is it not only comforts us when we're in need but it's the very agent of our growth.

[25 : 19] When we behold God's glory in Christ it transforms us. That's what 2 Corinthians 3 verse 18 says. It says this, and we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

So just like a child learns to walk by watching his parents walk or learns to eat by watching his parents eat so we become more like Jesus the more we behold him in his glory.

The more you see him the more you'll become like him. Day by day month by month year by year slowly but surely you'll become more like him.

And slowly is the key here. I can often want growth to come like this. Come right away like a microwave meal. You put in and then you click 30 seconds and then it's ready.

I guess no microwave meals get done in 30 seconds probably 2 minutes or something like that. But I want it in 30 seconds. That's the point. You know we have in our living room we have a tree.

[26 : 29] It's a fiddle leaf fig tree and it's one of the most finicky plants that I've ever seen in my life. If you move it an inch the next day a leaf will drop off.

It's really a hard plant to grow but over it we have a print that it says it's okay to grow slowly. And I think it's really more for us than for the plant because when we see this tree growing and we can wake up we can wake up and go and see is there a new leaf today?

Is there a new leaf today? Is it growing any higher? And you can't see it like that. Growth can't be measured like that. You grow slowly. So if you're here this morning and you're discouraged by your lack of growth take heart.

You've come to the right place. Church isn't a place to prove how godly you are. It's not a place to put your best foot forward. It's a place to receive the water and light of Jesus Christ.

We're all coming together in order to see Jesus in his cross and in his resurrection and in his ascension in his reign and as we see him together we're being changed to become more like him day by day.

[27 : 44] So together rooted in the unchanging soil of the gospel we're pressing on to grow. resisting distractions together and looking to Jesus. So that brings us to the third strategy for growth in the Christian life.

The third and final strategy is consider your hope. So we had remember Christ's work resist your distractions and consider your hope.

hope. So in verse 14 Paul gives us his final and most powerful motivation to grow.

He turns his eyes away from his past and his present circumstances and he looks forward to the prize at the end of the race. Yeah look with me in verse 14.

It says I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Yeah he considers what's lying ahead of him and he pushes forward in the Christian life.

[28 : 55] Every person you know every human being whether you're religious or not you're motivated by hope. If for some people you go to work motivated by hope.

Either you love what you do and you have hope of doing some good to somebody and even if you don't love what you do you're hoping for the paycheck at the end of the week that's going to supply for your needs and your family's needs.

All of our little decisions in life are based off hope. Where we live we hope to give a life or a better life to your kids than you had. You hope in the future.

As Walt said I work at a campus ministry called Volunteers for Christ and what we do is we go on campus and we try to meet people meet students and build relationships with them and share the gospel with them and hope to see them come to Christ and get plugged in to our local church and one day I met a guy named Daniel who I learned was actually the president of the philosophy club. So trying to share the gospel with the president of the philosophy club doesn't always end well but we struck up a good relationship and I tried to listen to him and talk to him the best I could and I would share something with him and he would have all these objections and all these questions and I really didn't have a whole lot of answers for him but one day as we sort of built up a relationship I just asked him Daniel what's your hope in life?

[30 : 35] He didn't believe in God he didn't believe in life after death and I just asked him what is your hope in life? Where's your story going? If everything ends in death isn't life meaningless?

What's your hope? And I'll never forget his reply I was expecting some sort of philosophical reply but he just said Drew I don't like that question that makes me very uncomfortable don't ask me that again so I didn't ask him and I wish I could say he was converted right there on the spot and is loving the Lord now but it often doesn't work that way but maybe you're hearing that question it makes you uncomfortable and when you think about your life you think yeah I don't know what hope I have at the end of this life's story but again we invite you you can have hope today you can have hope in Jesus Christ who died for your sins who was raised to life and reigns in glory and welcomes you into his presence today the context of this passage shows that Paul's hope is the resurrection of the dead it's being fully alive in a new body without suffering glorified in the presence of Christ we have a story that's going somewhere that goes through the grave and into glory that's what can get us out of bed this morning into church through the rain we come because we need to be reminded that as believers we're people who have been saved by Christ who need Christ every day and are headed to Christ this is the day we run for it's our only hope and the great thing is that as we gather together now every experience we have a fellowship with God the best quiet time that you've ever had the best church service if revival broke out in this church right now it would be a foretaste of what's to come it would be it would be like an appetizer before the main meal 1 Peter says that though we do not see him we love him and rejoice with joy that's inexpressible so if we're filled with

inexpressible joy in Christ even when we don't see him imagine what it's going to be like when we see him

Jonathan Edwards is a Puritan is an old American preacher and he helps us understand what this day is going to be like I think we have this quote for you as well he says to go to heaven to fully enjoy God is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here better than fathers and mothers husbands and wives or children or the company of any or all earthly friends these are but shadows but the enjoyment of God is the substance these are but scattered beams but God is the sun these are but streams but God is the fountain these are but drops but God is the ocean so there's no there's no hope like this no matter where you are no matter what you do there's no hope like this everything good in this world is like a shadow pointing us forward to something better that's coming

God is better than the best thing in this world and he will be ours when we see him and considering this hope it changes how we live in the here and now doesn't it if you're suffering you're tempted to lose faith in God's goodness this hope helps us endure because it reminds us that our suffering has an end it reminds us that our suffering has meaning 2 Corinthians 4:17 says that this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory to come so suffering may feel long and feel meaningless but because there's eternal joy ahead of us it is short and meaningful because it gets us ready it reminds us that we're not home yet it reminds us that there's something better waiting for us or maybe you're tempted to give in to sin you're tempted you're tempted to believe the world's message of you only live once so live it up while you can party have fun don't take everything so seriously why do all these Christians take life so seriously but as believers we don't have to live our best lives now we don't have to make the most out of every opportunity we don't have to spend all of our waking hours spending and getting trying to amount something of our lives here why it's because our best life is coming in the future in this life we grow and we become more holy and we seek to honor

Christ more because he's going to be ours at the end so our future hope inspires us to grow today to keep pressing on until we receive the prize so where are you at this morning where are those areas in your life that you want to grow that you want to make progress in are you growing I don't mean are you growing from last week to this week but over the course of years are you growing or are you coasting our text concludes with a call to maturity again Paul wants to communicate that he has not arrived in the Christian life he's not received the call yet and therefore there is still work to do can you believe that battle worn from years of ministry like I said earlier 30 years as a [37:04] Christian sitting in prison while he writes this for Christ he's given everything for Christ but he hasn't arrived yet he hasn't reached the destination and so he presses forward to grow and brothers and sisters if we're here this morning and if the apostle Paul hasn't arrived yet in the Christian life none of us have arrived either we have room to grow we have room to press on and to become more like Jesus so whether you've been a Christian for 30 years or whether you became a Christian this morning hearing the gospel there's room for you to grow and there's hope for you to grow because of the gospel of Jesus Christ so let us adopt this mindset together let us press on to grow because Christ has made us his own because Christ is with us and we can see him today because Christ is waiting for us at the end of the race let's press on to maturity and let me pray for us to that end

Father we thank you for your grace in Christ we thank you that you made us your own by grace through the death and resurrection of your son Jesus Lord none of us come today in righteousness of our own none of us come able to stand before you on our own and none of us on that last day we'll be able to stand on the basis of our own righteousness but we thank you this morning that Christ has made us his own and therefore we have hope to grow in Jesus name amen you've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at Trinity Grace Athens dot com B We'll be right back.