

## The Passionate Pursuit of Knowing Christ (Part 1) Philippians 3:12-16

### All Stand and Read Scripture

Philippians 3:12-16 (NASB)

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. <sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; <sup>16</sup> however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

### Prayer

#### INTRODUCTION:

A good parallel to this passage of scripture is **exercise**. Is there anyone here who would say that it is bad to exercise? I doubt that any would honestly think that it is better to be a **couch potato playing video games and watching TV all day while eating popcorn**. I am sure that all of you would agree that exercising is a good thing. I am not looking for a show of hands, but, how many of us actually exercise regularly. Most of us struggle to do it. We don't exercise because, first of all, it is **hard to find time** to do it and secondly, exercising is **physically, hard work**. It is difficult to convince yourself to do exercise because you don't get **instant gratification** for it. **You just get tired and sore.**

We live in a world that is seeking "instant gratification". **"I want what I want, and I want it now". The commercial says, "It is my money and I want it NOW!"** When you experience that way of life, you begin to realize that there is emptiness in your life. You realize that the thing that you worked so hard to get did not satisfy you as you thought it would. So we want more. We try to fill this vacuum that is within us by pushing possessions, prestige, and things into that vacuum, but it will never satisfy.

When we lose focus and start living for ourselves. We use our time and resources for ourselves. Then if there is anything left over, we will **"consider"** giving it to the Lord. We are in essence saying, "I am going to use what I have for **ME** first". That is a self-centered life.

Only one thing will fill that vacuum and that is a passion for Jesus Christ. **To love Him with your heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love others as yourself.** That begins to fill that vacuum in your life.

It is only when the long term benefits are considered that exercise starts to make sense. Once we have locked onto those benefits of more stamina, stronger muscles, less flab, and greater agility, it is much easier to set a schedule for exercising and set weight and strength goals.

Living your “new life” for Christ is much the same way. As Christians, **we all know** that we should be **pursuing Christ**. **We all know** that it is a **tremendous privilege to know Jesus Christ**. That is what Paul is talking about here in chapter 3.

Let’s review. In verse 8, Paul writes,

Philippians 3:8 (NASB)

**<sup>8</sup>More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,**

Let’s review what “Knowing Christ” really involves. This is not a word that refers to an “intellectual” or “book” knowledge of Christ.

This is a knowledge that is based upon a personal relationship with Christ. It is an intimate knowledge. It is the type of intimate knowledge that we have with our spouse.

#### ILLUSTRATION:

I shared with you earlier that when June and I eat at a restaurant...

- I know that if she gets water, she will want no ice with lots of lemon.
- I know she will not want anything that might contain pineapple.
- She knows that I will not want anything with cheese.

We are not talking of knowing **about** Christ. It is about **knowing** Christ.

In comparison to knowing Christ, everything else is loss. All of our earthly gains are of no value. There are no earthly gains that come close to “Knowing Christ”.

In previous weeks, we have talked about how we need to be “**more like Christ**”. We achieve this by being passionate about “**knowing Jesus Christ**”. The better we intimately know Christ by following what He teaches us through the scriptures, the more we will be like Him.

We **KNOW** this, but it is **HARD!** Just like exercise, it is hard to do. We must look beyond the instant gratification of earthly gains and see the long term benefits of serving Christ in our lives.

Paul gives us six spiritual exercise steps that we can use to pursue our goal of “**knowing Christ**”.

## **BODY:**

### **I. Recognize Our Spiritual Need**

Philippians 3:12a (NASB)

12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect

Paul doesn't say, "I know Him and am content in my Christian life". He says "I know Him, but there is so much more that I want to know".

Paul admits that he has not where he needs to be spiritually. He uses the word "already", which indicates that he fully intended to reach full spiritual maturity some day.

May I suggest to you that if you feel like you are falling very short of being where you need to be spiritually, that you look at Paul. Paul was still trying to get there. If Paul was not there, how can you expect to be there? None of us are where we need to be spiritually. None of us are even close to where we need to be spiritually, but we should be passionately trying to get there.

Why did Paul bring this up? Remember this part of the book is dealing with Judaizers who thought that they may have arrived because they were so careful about keeping the Old Testament law. They claimed faith in Christ, but they also gloried that they kept all the rules of the Old Testament

This can be applied to us today as well.

- We are people, hopefully, who read our Bibles daily.
- We are people who pray daily.
- We go to church every Sunday.
- We go to Bible study during the week.
- We dress conservatively.
- We don't bring the Lord's name in vain.
- We don't hang out in bars.
- We don't watch immoral shows on TV.

We are pretty good people, right? WRONG! We are not even close.

We are never going to grow or become compassionate about growth until we say the same thing that Paul said in verse 12, "I have not obtained"; "I have not become perfect"; and verse 13, "I have not laid hold of it yet".

Then how do you know that you are growing?

That is a good question, because, if I think I am doing well, it is a sign that I am not doing well.

- May I suggest that spiritual growth is an increasing realization of your own sin and shortcomings.

- May I suggest if you are really, really getting sick of your sinfulness, you are growing spiritually.
- May I suggest that if you are crying out to God for mercy as you fall, that you are actually growing.

We will never reach our spiritual goal, if we don't realize we have a great spiritual need.

## II. Diligently Pursue to be Like Christ

**Philippians 3:12b-13a (NASB)**

but I press on so that I may lay hold of (grab) that for which also I was laid hold of (grabbed) by Christ Jesus. <sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet;

“Press on” means to vigorously pursue. It is something that has a lot of energy in it. Paul says I press on so that I may lay hold of something. “Lay hold” means to grab. Christ grabbed me out of my sin, now, I want to work hard and grab hold of Him.

“We love Him because He first loved us.”

What we do is in response to what He has done. Why did Christ “grab” us at the time of our salvation? It is because He wanted us to become like Him. This is exactly what Romans 8:29 tells us.

**Romans 8:29 (NASB)**

<sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

What should we be doing?

We should be passionately pursuing to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. We should “press on” (or be hungry) to be like Christ.

## III. Do Not be Distracted.

**Philippians 3:13b (NASB)**

but one thing (*I do*): forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,

What happens to a sprinter who is always looking over his shoulder? He is being distracted from executing perfect form and is often overtaken in the race.

What do we look back towards?

In context, it could be good things. Paul talked about his confidence in the flesh as a Jew. He was circumcised, he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, he was a Pharisee, he persecuted the church thinking he was doing God's will.

Paul said he would not look back on them. He said he counted all these "good things" that he had done as "rubbish" in order to gain Christ. He was passionate about pursuing Christ.

Is it not true that we look back at past successes? We want to look back at past successes and evaluate where we are at spiritually.

- I haven't missed church for months, I am OK.
- I taught a Sunday School class this year, I am OK.
- I lead someone to Christ recently, I am OK.

We are looking back over our shoulders and it slows us down.

Sometimes we look back because of negative things that we have done.

Sometimes we need to forget the negatives and press on.

- Husbands, if you are looking back at all of the times that your wife has disappointed you.
- Wives, if you are looking back at all of the times that your husband has disappointed you.
- Parents, if you are looking back at all of the times that your children have disappointed you.

### **You are never going to win the race!**

Why should I look back? I am in a race! By God's grace, I want to win. Any time that I spend looking back could cause me to lose the race. I don't want to lose, I want to see Christ. I want to move forward.

Don't be distracted, move forward. It is just as simple as keeping our eyes on Christ and moving forward. Some may say that it is not that simple. I am not so sure about that. **Simple** does not mean **easy**! But, I do think it is simple. It is keeping our eyes on Christ and NOT being distracted regardless of what is in your past. We need to keep moving forward.

### **ILLUSTRATION:**

The US government did a study on why we have car accidents.

What do you think was the #1 reason for car accidents? It is a general reason.

Anybody want to guess?

The **#1** reason for car accidents in the US was **DISTRACTIONS**.

- 80% of all car crashes or near crashes were caused by distraction.
  - 25% was due to drowsiness.
  - 4% was dialing a cell phone.
  - 4% was talking on a cell phone.
  - 3% was reading.
  - 2% was eating.
  - 2% was reaching for an object.
  - 1% was applying makeup.
  - The study was done before texting, but I am sure, it ranks pretty high now.

The point is that the #1 reason for car accidents was not skill or mechanical failure. It is simply a lack of attention.

As Christians, we are so easily distracted. That is why we are not growing as we should.

#### IV. Stay Focused on the Prize.

Philippians 3:14 (NASB)

<sup>14</sup> I press on (pursue with passion) toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The goal is the same basically as the prize. When you are running a race, you are running to win. Paul wanted to win the prize.

What was the prize?

The prize was being like Jesus Christ. As he stated in verse 8, “the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”. **Knowing** Christ was his passion.

What is the “upward call of God”?

There are different interpretations on this.

1. Some think it refers to the end of a race.
2. Some suggest that it is the rapture of the church.
3. Another interpretation is that when we were saved and started a new life in Christ, we were called to be like Christ and we are pressing toward that goal.

Regardless of the interpretation, it is very clear that we should be pursuing the goal of Christ-likeness.

The question is, “What are you pursuing”?

- When you wake up in the morning?
- When you lay down to go to sleep?
- When you are driving?

What are you thinking about?

Is your mind on Christ? Or are you pursuing worldly things? Many of the things that we pursue may not be wrong, but they might not be the correct goal for a Christian who is growing.

We must have the goal and be passionate about the goal of being like Jesus Christ.

## **V. Think Like an Athlete.**

Philippians 3:15 (NASB)

<sup>15</sup> Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

Paul is not addressing this to only people who are living a perfect life, because there are none. The word “perfect” is referring to someone who thinks in this way.

- You need to admit your spiritual need.
- You need to diligently pursue Christ’s likeness.
- You need to not be distracted.
- You need to stay focused on the prize.
- You need to think like an athlete.

Which brings us to our sixth point this morning:

## **VI. Do Not Take Shortcuts.**

Philippians 3:16 (NASB)

<sup>16</sup> however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

The phrase “let us keep living” means to keep things in a line; keeping them straight. When compared to racing, it is like staying in your own lane. If you don’t, you will be disqualified. Don’t take shortcuts.

There are no shortcuts to a mature spiritual life. It all takes time.

A good parallel is like dieting. We all know that eating the right amount of the correct foods and exercise will cause us to lose weight.

Many diet plans will suggest that you can eat anything you want without exercise as long as you take their pill, etc. But these shortcuts never work.

When the diet plans fail, we go back to exercise and a balanced diet. It all takes time. There really no shortcuts in dieting. This is true in dieting which is not important and it is true in Christian growth which is all important.

## **CONCLUSION:**

What is spiritual growth all about?

- It is reading God's Word regularly.
- It is praying every day.
- It is listening to the Word preached and taught.
- It is listening to Christian music through the week.
- It is proclaiming God's Word to everyone who will hear.

It takes effort! How are you doing in your race?

- Are you willing to admit that you have a spiritual need?
- Are you diligently pursuing Christ's likeness?
- Not being distracted?
- Staying focused on the prize?
- Thinking like an athlete?
- And avoiding shortcuts?

What is your next step of spiritual growth? What is the next thing that you could work on that would please Christ. We are all at different levels of maturity. Let the Holy Spirit direct you into new areas for growth.

On Judgment Day you would be willing to exchange **ANYTHING** about your short life on earth in order to find your name in the "Lamb's Book of Life"! But, then it will be too late. What we want to hear on Judgment Day is **"Well done, my good and faithful servant!"** The time of our salvation is NOW!

If you have never turned your life over to Christ, today could be your day of salvation. Christ wants you to start living your life for Him and passionately pursue knowing Him. Christ died for all of your sins. Sin separates us from a perfect and Holy God and prevents us from knowing Christ. Christ has promised to take away your sins.

If you have not turned your life over to Christ, I want to give you that opportunity this morning.

If you are need of prayer, or want to become recognized as a member of Greenwood Christian church, please come forward this morning as we sing the invitation hymn.

### **He is Lord.**

He is Lord. He is Lord.  
He has risen from the grave and He is Lord.  
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess  
That Jesus Christ is Lord.