**Striving for the Living Christ**

**Philippians 3:12-14 / January 26th 2025**

**READING THE TEXT**

**12Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already been perfected—but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me.**

**13Brothers and sisters,[**[**s**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%203&version=NET#fen-NET-29419s)**] I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded:[**[**t**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%203&version=NET#fen-NET-29419t)**] Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead, 14with this goal in mind,[**[**u**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%203&version=NET#fen-NET-29420u)**] I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God[**[**v**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians%203&version=NET#fen-NET-29420v)**] in Christ Jesus.**

**INTRODUCTION**

What is it that Paul has not yet attained? That is found in verse 10, which we covered last week. **10My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, 11and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.**

Paul spoke in the past few verses about experiencing the power of Jesus’ resurrection, and to share in his sufferings, to die to himself like Jesus. The reward Paul is looking forward to for his faithfulness to Jesus is his resurrection from the dead. Last week was about attaining the resurrection as our final reward. This week the text is about being faithful along the way to the final reward.

Complacency is a problem for many of God’s people. We repent of our sins and are so grateful for God’s mercy and forgiveness. But then at some point we are tempted to take the grace of God for granted and begin sleepwalking through our faith. Others are tempted and lured away by things that appeal to our body appetites. We no longer strive to imitate Jesus and work out our salvation in fear and trembling. We organize our lives around things like entertainment and spend little time intentionally growing in the faith or ministering to others.

Paul reminds us to strive (or focus) instead of sleepwalk. “Stiving” isn’t acting serious all day it is remembering and acting like all that we do in life, whether working, or eating, or even watching sports can be done in a way that glorifies Jesus. And it is keeping the things on our schedule that slip away when we forget about God, like serving others, gathering for worship and praying without ceasing.

**PREACHING THE TEXT**

**“I have not been perfected”**

 There are two types of perfection that apply here. Becoming a believer means that Jesus takes his record of perfect living and applies it to us. In that sense we have achieved perfection. The perfect record of Jesus is ours. Wow!

The second part of perfection is about striving to live up to the calling and privilege that we have received in Jesus Christ. We live like we have been transformed by Jesus. We live to our new nature. People see glimpses of what Jesus might have lived like when they see us.

 Many people become believers and call it good. I’m saved and now I will rest on the prayer I said many years ago. Paul’s message is to not be satisfied.

ILLUSTRATION: Wood worker to craftsman

 I recall when I first started woodworking. A former shop teacher in my congregation taught me the basics of woodworking joints. The first thing I made was a simple CD shelf for my mother. Two boards joined together in a simple V shape sandwiched between two simple squares of wood to form the sides. Functional but not impressive. Then I tried my hand at making bookcases and drawers. I wasn’t satisfied with making simple things, so I kept practicing different more advanced things. After a few years I was able to make crown molding and now we make all kinds of cool things that we sell to fund our mission work. I could be satisfied with ‘pretty good’ but now I want to figure out how to make crosses using colored resin. I have this drive to advance and get the most out of the talent God has given. If I don’t press into new things and hard things my skill will not grow. And I will probably get bored with the holding pattern.

 It is the same for believers. Many believers settle for a basic understanding of the faith. Not everyone is born to be a bible teacher. But all of us can grow in our faith and our understanding of God’s word. All of us can practice serving and blessings others in the name of Jesus. Many believers are satisfied with the basics and do not become lifelong learners growing in the faith. And they do not lean into their faith and collaborate with what the Holy Spirit will do to grow us and bless others. The bible tells us to continually be filled with the Holy Spirit.

**Ephesians 5:18**

**And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,**

Did you know the bible commands us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This has nothing to do with speaking in tongues. It has everything to do with asking God to give us the mind of Christ and transforming our desires and motivations. How do we get filled with the Holy Spirit? We ask God to do it. No tricks or gimmicks. We lean into our relationship with Jesus. We don’t hide in shame when we blow it. We press through the noise of the world and press into the grace of Jesus. We don’t hide or ignore Jesus, but we press into Him.

**1 Peter 2:2** [**English Standard Version**](https://biblehub.com/esv/1_peter/2.htm) **Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—**

God is calling believers to LONG for spiritual food and the word of God just like infants cry out for mother’s milk. It sustains us and we crave it. That is our first calling. Crave to feed so we can grow. Don’t stop eating spiritual food and practicing what God teaching us to grow our spiritual muscles.

 But Paul addressed people in Corinth who were believers for years but who were still infants in the faith.

**1 Cor 3:1-5 NET**

**3:1 So, brothers and sisters,[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%203%3A1-5&version=NET#fen-NET-28397a)**] I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but instead as people of the flesh,[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%203%3A1-5&version=NET#fen-NET-28397b)**] as infants in Christ. 2I fed you milk,[**[**c**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Corinthians%203%3A1-5&version=NET#fen-NET-28398c)**] not solid food, for you were not yet ready. In fact, you are still not ready, 3for you are still influenced by the flesh.**

 Some believers do not strive to be filled with the Holy Spirit and remain fruitful in doing God’s will. We drift back to the way we used to think and act before we became believers. We fill our heads and hearts with the doctrine of Hollywood and the beliefs of our non-Christian friends, and our minds turn to mush. Others are still affected by the past and obsess about the negative things we have faced, so much so, that we don’t see the good things God has done for us or will do for us in the future. We count our curses instead of our blessings. We see ourselves as victims or people who are tainted. We strive to get our life from things that cannot give us life. And Paul tells us;

**“Forget The Past”**

Forgetting the past is not forgetting doctrine or forgetting the grace and mercy God showed us that led to our salvation. Forgetting the past is ceasing to let the past overshadow God’s calling and God’s plans for your life.

 For some, forgetting the past is not letting your shame over your past wipe you out. Still others look at the past and are tempted to go back to the things that used to harm our soul.

An Example is: People in desert looked back and reveled in the past not trusting God for the future.

**Numbers 11:5-6** We read about the Israelites who were focused on the past and slavery benefits.

In the desert many of the Israelites began romanticizing the past. They focused their minds on things they did not presently have. Fish, vegetables, spices were on their minds. All they had to eat was manna miraculously provided by God and it became boring. All they focused on was what they did not have. They got used to the miracle that food appeared miraculously each day and took it for granted.

They romanticized the past and forgot how harsh it was to be slaves and toil all day and all night for no pay. Often, we can romanticize or visualize the past and downplay our current blessings. We seek fleeting pleasures from the past and lose sight of our mission and forget the ways that God delivered us from slavery. We forget how good it feels to be free in Christ.

**“Look Forward”**

Instead of allowing the world to form our identity or getting our lives from things we used to crave for, Paul calls us to look forward. Looking forward towards God’s calling and mission. In this context, the “prize” is not heaven’s reward, it is winning more races along the way at each mile marker.

Imagine seeing your grandkids repent and receive Jesus Christ. Imagine being able to know that you finished studying a whole book of the bible by taking a few bites each day. Imagine being able to be part of a thriving, growing church with new believers. Imagine a depressed person breaking through because you called them and prayed with them daily. Imagine a new ministry thriving because you were willing to do your part and encourage the others involved. Imagine reaching the end of your life and being confident and hopeful because you trusted Jesus despite all the noise and challenges this world presented. Learn lessons of the past and praise God for his work in the past but don’t live in the past.

**“Striving”**

 Paul assumed there will be resistance, but Paul says, “press forward” and “strive” to reach the prize of God’s reward. Press into God’s mission even when it is hard. This is the kind of striving spoken about in Ephesians 6 in which Paul tells believers to take up the armor of God. There are two things we will focus on related to the armor of God and striving.

These are spiritual battles

 The bible tells us we do not war against flesh and blood but against principalities, powers and rulers in the heavenly realms. We think we only have a bad neighbor who yells at us, but we forget that he is fueled by evil forces. And we forget to pray for him and fight the real enemy. The word of God tells us we do not just strive against things we can see. Our answer is not complicated. Do what we can using the mind of Christ in the seen realms and pray and ask God to cover the things you cannot see.

 ***Eph 6:14 Truth***, ***righteousness*** and ***God’s word*** are weapons.

 The next thing we learn is that Truth, Righteousness, and God’s word are weapons to fight this war as we press forward into God’s mission and God’s will.

**Truth:** Stand firm – Jesus is truth – we are armed with God’s word. One of Satan’s strategies is to hide the truth and get people to buy into lies. Satan loves to wage propaganda wars, and he wages this war on social media and on the television and in our schools and universities. He paints God and faith in Christ in the worst way and makes the things of this world almost impossible to avoid and resist. But God’s word snaps us out of Satan’s mind control and reprogramming. Read the word and wage an anti-propaganda war against the devil. If you come across some idea, check it out with the word of truth.

**Righteousness:** Practice holy living – don’t be disqualified

**Sword (of the Spirit):** in this passage the Greek term is not logos, it is rhema (which means God will bring to mind specific verses when we need them)

**SUMMARY**

 The things we learned today are straight forward. We can look to the past and be affected and driven by the world. Or we can strive to be filled with the Spirit and win the battle for souls that God has given us to reach and bless. We can stay on mission and focus our minds on the mission of Jesus. We can focus our minds on worldly pursuits and entertain ourselves to the grave, or we can focus on the mission of God.

**TAKING IT HOME**

1. Are you still hungry to feed on God’s word and God’s presence in prayer?
2. Are you looking for the answers to life’s questions in God’s word? Do you look stuff up?
3. Are you controlled by the past or are you looking ahead?