

Pressing on to Know the Lord

by Bob Hoekstra

The sermon teaches that knowing the Lord is the ultimate priority in life, achieved through various experiences including suffering and resurrection power.

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Topics: "Knowing Christ", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of pressing on to know the Lord as life's highest priority. It highlights the need to count all worldly gains as loss for the excellence of knowing Christ Jesus, focusing on the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, and being conformed to His death. The goal is to live a resurrected life in a dead world, forgetting the past and reaching forward to what lies ahead, all for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Transcript

Let's pray together about our study time, shall we? Lord, as we open the Word, we come seeking You. We're so thankful for the Word of God, Lord, that we can only but underestimate it in its life-giving reality, in its power, in its truth, in its active engagement with our hearts, leading us in the way everlasting. Lord, we thank You so much for the Word, but we realize through the study of the Word that Your Holy Spirit must guide us into all the truth.

And we pray, Lord, that You would pour out Your Spirit upon us today. Give us ears to hear, give us eyes to see, give us hearts to respond. Lord, do that irreplaceable work deep in the very core of our being, in the very heart of our person.

Lord, speak to us, shape our minds, and work in us both to will and to do of Your good pleasure. We pray in Jesus' name, amen. These two studies, they're all under the great heading of knowing God, knowing God.

That's what our two studies are about. Our first study in Philippians 3, verses 2 through 9, was entitled, Life's Highest Priority. So good to not be left floundering and wondering what life is all about and what we should be aiming at day by day as we walk with the Lord.

Life's highest priority. And we saw in verses 7 and 8 that life's highest priority was spelled out. But what things were gained to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.

Yet indeed I also count all things lost for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ. As a reminder, Paul was testifying that what things were gained to him, and he had many things that had brought much gain to him in his culture, in the development of his life, in the religious status that he had achieved. He was Mr. Hebrew, a Hebrew of the Hebrews.

But he counted all of that loss. He counted it lost. Back in his conversion on the road to Damascus when the Lord struck him down on his face on the road and humbled him and stopped him.

And Paul knew he was being confronted by the Lord. You just want to know who are you Lord? And of course it was the Lord Jesus Christ. And from that point, at that point, during that encounter with the Lord, Paul counted all of his fleshly religious progress as loss, viewed as without value when it came to receiving the Lord Jesus Christ and following Him as the Lord of his life.

And then he built right on that in verse 8, Yet indeed I also count all things lost. Verse 7 past tense, remember? Happened at his conversion. He counted all lost.

How about when he was writing this letter? He said, verse 8, Yet indeed I also count all things lost. He still had that attitude. May it be the same with us.

When we turned from the things of the world and sin and self and came to the Lord Jesus Christ and looked upon all of that as just an interference, an obstruction to what life was all about. When we gave our hearts to the Lord and asked the Lord into our life, we counted all human fleshly worldly gain as loss when it came to that precious value. But now, today, we are to count all things lost.

Present tense. Every day, that's the way to view life. Count all things.

Anything that would interfere with knowing the Lord. Anything that would keep us from embracing who the Lord is, what He's done, all that He wants to do. Count it loss for this.

For the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. And as we suggested, that could be translated for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. The excellence.

The surpassing value. If there's anything that has value, it comes from God. But what is a greater value than such things? God Himself.

God Himself. The surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Getting to know the Lord.

That is life's highest priority. Everything else is to fit in and under that. Be measured whether or not it's even valid by that.

And then be worked in our lives as we are pursuing that one great goal in life. Knowing the Lord. And Paul said, For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, count them as refuse, that I may gain Christ.

In other words, gain Christ. Get to know the Lord more and more. Better and better.

And see all the great things He wants to develop in our lives. Knowing the Lord. That is life's highest priority.

It kind of brings us to this study. This second of two studies. We'll follow right on in Philippians chapter 3. And under that heading of knowing the Lord, this study could rightly be called, I believe from terms used in the Scripture here, pressing on to know the Lord.

God's called us to a life of not just, you know, coasting and wasting and frittering away time, but a great goal, getting to know the Lord, and the time that He gives us, pressing on to know Him. Eager, hungry to know Him better. To get more acquainted with Him.

Become more of a disciple of His. To become more and more of a friend of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isn't that astounding, the thing? That through His work on the cross and us just humbly bowing down and trusting Him, inviting Him into our lives, that He now calls us friends? It wasn't always that way, was it? We might have hesitated to admit it before we came to Christ, but we were His enemies.

In fact, we might have been insulted if anyone even suggested that, you know? But we were. We were in enmity with God. But there has been a reconciliation.

The Lord has done what it took to close that gap. And all we had to do was humbly bow and invite Him into our lives. And now He is our dearest friend.

And He wants us to press on in life to know Him. Picking up in verse 10, verse 10 speaks of three aspects of knowing the Lord. We are to be growing in our acquaintanceship with the Lord.

Verse 10 speaks of three ways the Lord lets us grow in acquaintanceship As we're in the Lord, learning about Him and His ways, the Lord takes us through these three aspects of life. In fact, they can cycle repetitiously through our lives. And I believe you can document that in Scripture as well as see it fit our own personal testimony.

Three aspects of acquaintanceship with the Lord. The greatest value in life, the most excellent surpassing value, knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Then verse 10 picks it up.

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death. By just the grammar of it, the English of verse 10, it looks like four things are listed there. Knowing Him, power of His resurrection, fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to death.

Actually, there's one great thing here with three aspects. What's the great thing? Well, we've been told. Knowing the Lord.

That context helps sort this out for us. There's one big issue here, that I may know Him. It's like a life goal.

It's like our greatest prayer request. You know, where are you headed in life? What are you aiming at? How do you explain your life? We can be able to say with the Apostle Paul that I may know Him. Him being the Lord Jesus Christ.

If someone said, where do you invest your time? And what is your purpose in life? That I may know Him. If someone said, how can I pray for you? That I may know Him. It's amazing how many questions you can answer with that great truth.

That I may know Him. Then what are these other three things? Well, that I may know Him and, now that word actually can be translated many places in the Greek New Testament as the sense of even or

namely. That I may know Him, even.

Or, namely, specifically. Here's how I want to get to know Him. The power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death.

Three ways in our pilgrimage that God works to let us know Him better. Just glancing at the list, what's your favorite? I think all of us would clasp onto that first one, don't you? The power of His resurrection. What a great way to get to know the Lord.

And it's put first here, I think, because that's exactly the way it unfolds in the life of a Christian. We get introduced to the Lord in the power of His resurrection. We were dead in trespasses and sins in Adam by natural birth.

We had demonstrated, didn't we, in all kinds of ways that we were children of Adam and Eve. We had our own fall, our own sins, our own accountability. And we were dead.

And Ephesians 2 tells us that. Dead in trespasses and sins. Not just struggling, not just needing a little boost, not just needing a bit of education, not just needing some training.

I mean, what is that to a dead man? We were dead. And the Lord God got His gospel to us. The good news of life and life eternal.

And the convicting work of the Spirit. And the goodness of that good news. And we called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and we were raised to newness of life.

Oh, the glory of it. From death to life through faith in Christ. That was the power of the resurrection at work in our lives.

No wonder those were such glory days. Not that we didn't have struggles and all that, but oh, I'm alive. A lot of things can be said, but here's what I wanted to celebrate.

I'm alive in the Lord Jesus Christ. The power of His resurrection. He who died on our behalf.

He who was raised from the dead. Raised us to walk in newness of life through faith in His holy name. How is that for an introduction to someone? When we met the Lord, did He not have an immeasurable impact on our lives? In fact, for many a believer, first saved, you have a little season there where you wonder, can anything ever be but absolutely perfect every day, all the time, in every way? It's like glory, hallelujah, you know.

You look around at some of the other saints, a little mopey, a little defeated. Come on, let's dance, let's leap for joy. And there's total reason for that.

It's not just an emotional burst. It's actually, hey, I met the risen Lord. And you know what happened? He gave me new life.

I once was dead, but now I live. Isn't that glorious? What an acquaintanceship that is. Just for openers.

Just sinner meets your Savior. Savior, you know your sinner. And you gave that sinner your life.

What an acquaintanceship. What an introduction. What a glorious start to an eternal friendship.

Knowing the Lord. The power of His resurrection. The risen Lord.

Along the ways, we've probably found out we need that resurrection touch not a few times along the way. And I think, rightly, it is a favorite for so many of us. But you know, there are other ways to get to know the Lord.

And these aren't really optional. These are things the Lord ordains and works in our lives. If it was simply optional, we'd probably just stay right there on the first one.

I just want to hear about, know about, experience, taste, and see nothing but resurrection at every moment. What's always available and the resurrection power of God, according to Ephesians and elsewhere, is to be at work in our lives, day by day. But there is another way to get to know the Lord and the fellowship of His sufferings.

Some of us, the first time we suffered after we were saved, we thought we had lost our salvation. For some of us, no one told us. Or if they told us, we were just too happy shouting, jumping, and rejoicing.

If they suggested that sufferings might come along or would for sure eventually, we either didn't hear it, didn't want to believe it, or thought, not for me. But, this is one way we get to know the Lord. The fellowship of His sufferings.

Jesus was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. He came from heaven above out of this perfect communion through eternity with the Father, with the Spirit. He came down here to this sin-scarred planet to seek and to save that which is lost.

And oh, how He suffered. Suffering is inevitable on a planet that is in rebellion against its Creator. And you even add millions of Christians.

You've got another factor to add too. The devil stalks about with quite a band of cohorts. And then you have the world system and fallen humanity.

And then you have the believer's flesh. Our natural tendency to the ways of the world when we're not trusting step-by-step in the reality and the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. There's going to be suffering on this planet.

We're going to participate in it. We're going to observe it. We're going to experience it.

But here's the big thing. Some of that suffering is designed to be a fellowship for us of His sufferings. You know, if you're rebellious against God, if you disobey God, if you're out in the world and don't want anything to do with God, you're going to suffer from the consequences of foolishness and sin and hard-heartedness.

That's not the suffering we're talking about here because Jesus never suffered that way. His testimony was, I always do those things that please the Heavenly Father. And yet He suffered.

We're talking here about suffering for Christ's sake. Suffering for righteousness' sake. Suffering not because we've done wrong, but suffering, quite the contrary, because we have done right in given situations.

Jesus learned obedience by the things that He suffered. Learned obedience. Not really learned how to obey because He was always in a spirit of obedience and never in rebellion, but He learned the dimensions of obedience.

He experientially found out what it was to please a holy God in an unholy world. And it brought agony to His soul and He wept upon this earth. And in the Garden of Gethsemane as it were, drops of blood coming forth.

And certainly on the cross, the ultimate suffering for righteousness' sake to pay our debt of sin. When the Lord lets us get into suffering for walking in righteousness, for standing with the Lord, for standing for His truth, for obeying Him and not being conformed to the world, we have a fellowship in His sufferings. A participation in His suffering.

A new appreciation of who He is and what He did on our behalf. And what it means to identify with Him in a fallen world. It's another very precious, invaluable arena in which to get to know the Lord better.

That I may know Him, even the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering. And then third, being conformed to His death. It's one thing to suffer for righteousness' sake.

It's one thing beyond that to get buried for righteousness' sake. To get entombed for righteousness' sake. A conformity to Jesus' death.

It can happen to us through the experiencing of impossible challenges that so far go beyond our energy, our strength, our wisdom. And sometimes it feels like even our faith itself. And we even say sometimes, this thing I'm going through, it's killing me.

You ever said that? Most people have. I've sure said that along the way. What's going on? What's happening? You seem kind of troubled.

Yeah, this battle right now, it's killing me. And you know, that's more accurate than we know. We get placed in over our heads.

And it just seems like we're being circumstantially buried. In warfare, in impossibility, in heartbreak, in heartache. What's that about? Well again, if it's not for personal rebellion and hard-heartedness, that degree of suffering is this next third area.

Being conformed to His death. Jesus came to this earth and not only suffered in offering us salvation, but He died to accomplish the Father's will. And He has this arena in which He wants us to get to know Him better.

Oh, it's glorious and appropriate to know that our Lord is a resurrected Lord. But it's very important along the way to be learning that our Lord was a suffering Lord. And the Lord has ways to even add a depth of knowing of Him to be reminded that our Lord was a crucified Lord.

That all of that it took for Him to fulfill the Father's will. And we're called to follow Him. He's the way, the truth, the life.

Certainly no one can match His death. It was an atoning sacrifice for all sin, for all time and eternity. Made available through the Gospel.

No one can match His death, but all of us can have a participating taste of that. When Jesus hung on the cross, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? I don't think He cried that because He was perplexed. He knew that was where He was headed.

I think He cried that out quoting the opening words of Psalm 22 to let that Bible-searching nation and the Bible-expert leaders know you're looking at the fulfillment of that great messianic psalm. And He was tasting separation from the Father who is life. And it was on our behalf.

And He committed His spirit unto the Lord. He was a helpless sacrifice Lamb. And if He was going to come out of that tomb that awaited Him, it would have to be by the faithfulness of the Father.

And so it is with us in our circumstantial entombments. We get buried. We get a little taste of what it is to be helpless when everything depends on the faithfulness of another.

That's where our Lord Jesus was. And this is part of getting to know Him better. Yes, the power of His resurrection.

Oh, and even a partnership in a measure of His sufferings for righteousness sake. And yes, even being conformed to His death. The death died to fulfill the will of the Father.

And though we cannot atone for others, we can be a blessing to others. And Paul even said in 2 Corinthians 4, So death works in us, but life in you. It's amazing when people look on to those who are dying circumstantially, but trusting in the Lord.

They're so aware of the dying of it all. And others looking on the dying one, as it were, circumstantially, who's trusting in the Lord. They're enlivened.

They're encouraged. They're blessed by what they see. They know not the agonies of the dying process, but they see the reality of the broken, humble, dependent aspect of it.

And we get to know our Lord and appreciate Him more, and get to make Him known. And you know, behind all of these glorious truths in Philippians 3 is the matter of making Christ known. You know, we're concentrating on knowing the Lord.

This is not to be some selfish trip we're on, though there's blessing beyond measure for us in that pilgrimage. The Lord wants us to be witnesses. He wants us to be disciple makers.

He wants us to make Him known. How can you make known someone you do not know? You can't. The more deeply we know the Lord, the more effectively will we make Him known in attitude, deed, and word, in relationships and priorities, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death.

And you know, this is right where it circumstantially sort of recycles experientially for us in our pilgrimage. Recycles to what? Back up to the top of the list. Back up to the power of His resurrection.

How's that, you might say. Well, it is in the conformity to His death where we are circumstantially buried that we are crying out in our helplessness. We know we cannot change the situation ourselves.

We know we have to rely on the faithfulness of another, our Lord. And we have already learned that He is a God of resurrection. And as He once forever raised us from deadness in Adam to newness in Christ by

the power of His resurrection, so in our daily entombments or our periodic burials circumstantially, He applies that same resurrection power to our dying situation.

I remember the first time the Lord ever let my wife and I get circumstantially entombed. It's happened since then, but never quite like the first time. Why? Because we thought it was all over.

We were buried in ministry. We were buried in warfare. We were buried in impossibility.

We were buried in perplexity. And this after, oh, about 10, 12, 14 years of ministry? We did not expect this. Yes, maybe I had taught this passage, but I did not expect to experience it.

Maybe I was concentrating on clear, sound doctrine, and that's very important. But I had forgotten, maybe, that the doctrine of the Word becomes the life of those who believe it. Oh, I remember when the Lord called us out of that tomb.

He used a brother who didn't even know what was happening. He came to visit me, and I thought, you know, I guess everything's all over. So much discouragement, such meager faith, which seems to be disappearing, doors closing.

You know, it's like, let's just pack it up and be buried. The Lord sent a young man. I had been the teacher of his in an interdenominational Bible study, and he was in a denominational church, really quite liberal group as far as their confidence in conserving the truth of God's Word.

And he said, I went to my pastor and told him that someone was real hungry for more of the Bible and asked if we could start a home Bible study. And the pastor said, sure. He was open to anything, even the Bible, you know.

That is, in a home study. And I asked him if I could ask you to teach it. Well, I started crying.

And he said, well, you don't have to. I said, no, no, dear friend. That's not what these tears are about.

Those tears were about a little resurrection life that just stirred in my heart right while he was asking that question. I was really doubting if I would be teaching the Word of God anymore. I mean, how could I? Look what it's all come to, this disappointment and frustration and impossibility and despair.

And in fact, we did go to lead that study and taught there. And there were some hungry saints there and they grew. There were some there who were not saints and they got saved.

It was just a little resurrection revival, you know. And before we knew it, we were out of the tomb, back shouting and dancing and jumping, at least in our hearts. I'm kind of a reserved guy.

We were back on resurrection ground, you know. And you know, there have been a few cycles through that, a few entombments. If you haven't been there yet, don't panic over this prophecy that you will be, because you have with you the God of resurrection.

And if you're right now going through your first entombment, be encouraged, there'll be others. But that is encouraging, which means what? You're going to be raised out of this one. You're going to be raised out of this one.

The Lord is not through. And we get to know Him better and better. Once you've been raised out of that entombment, oh, it takes such a weapon away from the enemy.

He might come and say, you'll cooperate or I'll bury you. And if we've never been buried, that's very intimidating. But if we have been and been raised to press on to know the Lord, it's almost like you can have a quiet chuckle in your heart.

Well, if you do, I know who's going to trumpet with His mighty resurrecting power. And then, this getting to know the Lord in these three arenas, really leads to more resurrection, living in our own lives. And that's our next issue in verse 11.

Resurrected living, if by any means, tied right into verse 10, knowing the Lord and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means, through these three means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Years ago as a teacher, I really wrestled with that verse 11 because I misunderstood it. I thought, this has to be talking about the final resurrection.

There it is, the resurrection from the dead. But biblically, theologically, I'm thinking, that can't be. Paul wasn't still hoping to attain to the final resurrection.

What's the deal here? He's already there in Christ. He's going to have that place. And I prayed and prayed and read and read and meditated on that verse and what this passage was saying and what I understood of the Bible.

And I kind of wrote out what it seemed to me that it had to be about. It seemed like it had to be about something Paul was reaching for more of right now, that I may attain to. Something he was reaching for right at that moment, right at that time, right as he wrote.

Really, you could say day by day. It was interesting, somehow I came across an amplified Bible about that time. I don't know if someone gave it to me or what.

And this verse reads in that elaborated translation, which is not really a direct translation. It's taking the key words of every verse and giving multiple synonymous, valid translations of that word in the Greek. It can be helpful, but it's not to take it all just as a direct translation.

Anyway, the verse reads, that if possible, I may attain to the spiritual and moral resurrection that lifts me out from among the dead, I would add world, even while in the body. And I had paraphrased in prayer something that was about 95% word for word. Lord, thank you for the encouragement.

And the more I've searched the word and taught this passage, I think that is exactly the point. Resurrection living! That's what comes out of a pilgrimage through these three arenas. The power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His suffering, being informed of His death, and then He comes through and raises us.

We press on in that power of the resurrection. Some other suffering comes, maybe even another entombment, and we cry out to Him and He faithfully raises us. You know what it's doing in us? Building a confidence in a resurrected Lord to provide a resurrected life for us.

This world is dead. The world needs to see people living in the reality of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the good times, the tough times, and the absolutely despairing impossible times.

Resurrected living becomes more and more the characteristic of our lives as we let the Lord work in these ways. As we go a little further, we'll see that the verses before this sure fit that understanding, and the verses right after it fit exactly into that understanding. If by any means I may attain to resurrected living in a dead and dying world.

Then verse 12, Paul humbly confesses that he had not fully arrived. Not that I have already attained to what? To this resurrected living. And see again, he'd already attained to the final resurrection from the dead, because he was in Christ the resurrected one.

Now he's talking about verse 11, this day by day pilgrimage into more and more of a resurrected life in a dead world. Not that I have already attained. Think of the humility.

Paul had to be 25 to 30 years into his pilgrimage with the Lord. And he says, not that I have already attained. Well, what do you mean Paul? Or I'm already perfected.

He's saying, not that I have gone through so much of this getting to know the Lord. So often in these three ways that I face every dead thing the world, the flesh, or the devil throw at me only and with a resurrected viewpoint and a resurrection victory. He said, I'm not saying that.

Though we know he had grown extensively by this time, no doubt. Not that I have already attained or I'm already perfected. But I press on.

May that be so of us. No one fully arrives in Christ's likeness until we're in glory with him. And then we shall be as he is because we shall see him as he is.

First John 3. And the Apostle Paul, good reminder to walk in humility. Hey, God may have shown us a lot of things. He may have done a lot of things.

Listen, he's infinite. How much could that be when you compare it? There's plenty to learn. There's plenty to grow in.

There'll be no end to learning and growing in this life if we just keep pressing on to know the Lord. Not that I've already attained or I'm already perfected, but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me. On the road to Damascus, the Lord Jesus Christ laid hold of Paul, didn't he? Almost like grabbing a puppy by the scruff of the neck.

Paul, we need to talk. Knocked him on the ground. Humbled him.

Turned him from a know-it-all religious schemer, blasphemer, and actually murderer as he bore witness to his own previous life in 1st Timothy 1.12. The Lord laid hold of him. He'd heard the gospel. He'd seen the testimony of the saints.

He saw a dying martyr trusting the Lord for resurrection life, Stephen. And the Lord nailed him and said, it's hard to kick against all this, isn't it? Well, the Lord's laid hold of our lives, too. Why did the Lord lay hold of the apostle Paul? Why has he laid hold of our lives? Called us, rescued us, brought us back to himself for the very purposes of this chapter.

That we may know Him. That we may know Him. That's why He laid hold of our lives.

And then, of course, as we get to know Him, we can be instruments in His hands for others to get to know Him. That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of me. A humble confession that He hadn't already attained to fullness of life in all of these issues.

But, He was ready to press on. He wanted to get to know the resurrected Lord so well that He might live more and more of a resurrected life in this dead world. Another way to put it is, He wanted to continue to answer Jesus' call, Come, follow Me.

Come, follow Me. Come, walk with Me. Let's go through life together.

Get acquainted with Me. And I'll change you, is basically the promise of the Lord. Verse 13, This left Paul with a single focus.

A single focus. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, again, I'm not considering that I've laid hold of all of this that I'm here speaking of to its fullest extent. But one thing I do, there's the single focus.

One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. One thing I do. That's quite a confession, isn't it? You think of the Apostle Paul.

If we said, What do you do, Paul? And we knew a little bit about him, and we'd read some of the Word, we'd expect a very elaborate explanation of what he did. Well, I travel the world, I engage in major spiritual warfare here and there, I preach the Gospel, I evangelize souls, I make disciples by the grace and work of God in my life, I gather them together in churches, I appoint elders, I sometimes stay around as the interim pastor for two or three years, I come back around and encourage them in the faith. Oh yeah, there's one other thing I do.

When they lock me up in prison, I sit down and write the Bible. Wow! You do all those things? Well, he did. But that's not how he viewed it, was it? What was his perspective? But one thing I do.

He had a single focus in life. Oh God, grant to us that we might receive that ourselves. A single focus.

Not that I have things I do at home, and things I do at work, and things I do at school, and things I do at the church. How about all of that caught up under one thing? Pressing on to know the Lord. Just different arenas to grow in the knowing of the Lord and help others get to know the Lord.

One thing I do. It's like Psalm 27.4. We'll return right there in a moment. I'll read this if you like.

Psalm 27.4. It's the heart of David. One thing I have desired of the Lord that will I seek. What was the one thing David wanted to be the passion of his heart? That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple.

He wanted to hang out with the Lord and get to know the Lord and inquire about the Lord. That's just David's way to say what the Apostle Paul would say 1,000 years later. One thing I do.

It's kind of like Philippians 1.21. For to me, to live is Christ. That's it. What's your life about, folks might say to us.

You know from the depths of my heart, this is it. Not that I've attained fully to this. But it's this.

To me, to live is Christ. To me, life is about another person who is the Prince of life. The Lord of life.

The giver of resurrection life. We're back to knowing Christ. Every other goal for a Christian should fit in and under that goal, be measured by that goal and propelled by it as well.

And then Paul said in that one thing he did, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. Oh, that is an astounding statement. Forgetting what lies behind, reaching forward to what lies ahead.

The Kingdom of Heaven develops in our lives in these two great directions. Pressing forward, looking upward. Upward, heavenly things, heavenly places.

Not down and around, not in and back. You know the ways of man. Inward and backward.

You can see it much in the way people sometimes want to minister with one another. You can see it in the philosophies and counsels of the world. You can see it in psychotherapy.

You know, you sit down and they say, well, tell me about yourself. What an explosive invitation. What a loaded invitation.

Tell you about me? How many years do you have? As many as you do. And there goes off a great partnership, you know. I'm not saying that we shouldn't disciple one another with connection and perseverance and availability, but the way of the world.

Inward. What's going on in there? Tell me, come on, open up. And you can't go very far in that direction until you have this compulsion to go in a second direction.

What's that? Back. You're entertaining what? You're thinking about what? You're remembering what? Tell me more about it. We're sort of a god of resurrection.

We're new creatures called the walking newness of life. You can't find life abundant within, explained by, back there, any more than you could go to a graveyard digging for life. It's the wrong place.

Maybe looking for the right thing. And especially to pay folks to help us remember, you know. I would want to put tongue in cheek and say, how much would it cost to help me forget? I might be tempted to have another appointment, you know.

Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things that are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Pressing forward, reaching upward.

That's where life grows. Not inward and backward. We're not to allow anything of the past to divert us, distract us or hold us back.

And there are so many things there that want to do that and have that potential, don't they? There's so much more for us to be experienced in the Lord. Listen. Past defeats need not prevent present progress.

And at the same time, past blessings cannot guarantee present progress. So where do you go? You take a step each day, steps through the day, pressing forward, looking upward. Focus on Jesus and what He might do the next moment, the next hour, the next church service, the next private devotional time, the next conversation, the next email you open.

Right where we are, we're stepping into the very next thing we're going to experience. That's right where God works. God told Paul this.

He taught Paul this. And praise the Lord, it was recorded for our benefit too. Pressing onward, looking upward.

However much we've grown in the Lord, there's plenty more growing to do and it lies out there just right in front of us. So verse 14, we'll conclude with this. Pressing toward the goal.

I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. I press toward the goal. I press toward it.

I have a yearning in my heart, Paul is saying. I'm eager. I'm hungry.

I want to know Him and see Him at work. I press toward the goal. It's not a fleshly religious striving.

That's already been dealt with. Chapter 3, verse 3. We have no confidence in the flesh. It's not something we make happen.

It's a person we're pursuing. We just want to know Him more. Today, next step, next moment, next conversation, next thought.

I press toward the goal. The goal, what's that? He's already told us. That I may know Him.

That's what he's pressing toward, a relationship. And he pressed toward the goal for the prize. What's the prize? It's every blessing that comes from getting to know Him better.

Eternal blessing. Temporal provision. Temporal enablement.

I press toward the goal of knowing Him for the prize for every benefit that develops as I get to know Him better. The prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. What's that? That's heaven's call to everyone who is in Christ.

And what is that call saying through the Scriptures? Come and get to know me better. Come, follow me. That's the upward call.

This is Paul's testimony. This is God's call for us. How would you specifically, practically do this in light of the Word? Well, get into the Word.

This is where the Lord reveals Himself. Get into the Word. Hear from the Lord.

Cry out to the Lord in prayer. Let the Lord speak to you in His Word and answer Him from the depths of your heart. Hang out with His people.

2 Timothy 2.22 says, press on to know the Lord basically with those who call upon the name of the Lord from a pure heart. Find others who are thinking this way and walk with them and hang out with them and help them and they'll help you. Trust in the Lord.

Psalms 34.8 says, O taste and see that the Lord is good. The Lord is good, but that goodness is to be tasted. Taste and see that the Lord is good.

How do you do that? The second half of the verse explains it. Blessed is the man who trusts in Him. Whatever we're facing, take it to the Lord.

Entrust it to Him. Trust in Him to work in it. He'll show His goodness.

We'll grow in His grace. We'll know Him better. We'll help others to do the same.

Let's pray together. Lord, we're so thankful that the entire kingdom of heaven can be brought down to the simplicity of a one-on-one relationship. We are the needy ones.

You are the life-giving one. And Lord, we want to just embrace this heart of the Apostle Paul. We want knowing You to be our highest priority in life.

We want the implication for us to be pressing on to know the Lord day by day. Lord, we're asking this in line with Your Word. We're asking this according to Your will.

And we know by Your Word that therefore we have been heard and that we have the petitions that we have requested. So Lord, it is with great expectation that we press on to know You. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

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