

From Now On

by Peter Maiden

Peter Maiden's sermon emphasizes the importance of pressing on in the Christian faith with a deep desire to know Christ and grow spiritually.

Duration: 1:13:18

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, Philipians 3:13

Topics: "Christian Living"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker challenges the audience to examine their Christian lives and determine if they are truly straining towards what lies ahead. He emphasizes the importance of daily progress and not dwelling on past accomplishments. The speaker uses the parable of the man who found treasure in a field to illustrate the need to prioritize spiritual growth over worldly desires. He also highlights the biblical exhortations to constantly progress and add to our faith. The overall message of the sermon is to encourage believers to be serious about their Christian life and constantly strive towards spiritual growth.

Transcript

Right, I'd like you to turn to Philipians chapter 3. I'm sure when you think of the subject of pressing on, that's probably where your mind goes to. Philipians chapter 3, verse 12. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do. Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

For as I have often told you before, and now say again, even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction. Their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame.

Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will

transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the privilege of being together this weekend. Thank you for the time and the desire you've given us to be together.

Thank you for the freedom we've had to meet and hear your word and sing your praise quite freely. Thank you, Lord, for everything you've said to us. But, oh God, we appeal to you this afternoon that what we've been through this weekend together might not just be an information exercise, might not just be an academic exercise, but, Lord, we do pray that it will be a life-changing experience.

We pray that many of us will look back to this weekend later in our lives and see this weekend as an opportunity we took to take a step fresh, a step of faith, a step of commitment. Lord, we pray that even this afternoon, in this final session, you'll help us to seal some issue with you. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, this third chapter of Philippians is a chapter of personal testimony. The Apostle Paul has explained in the opening verses, which I'm sure are very familiar verses to you, how all the things he had previously considered to be so important and which other young men of his generation would certainly have considered to be highly important, he now considered as loss or refuse.

And he just had one consuming ambition in life. You can read about that in verse 8. He says, I consider everything else a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. There'd been this transformation in the life of this man, Saul of Tarsus, who used to live for many things, things which others of his generation lived for, had become Paul of Tarsus.

There'd been this transformation in his whole life. And the one consuming ambition now was to know Christ Jesus my Lord. And verse 9, to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Now, I just want you to look at those two verses, 8 and 9, for a moment. And I want you to recognize the spiritual desire that comes through that statement. I consider everything a loss compared to this.

This consuming, driving ambition in Paul's life to know Jesus Christ. You know, if I pray for anything more than any other in my life, and if I was to pray for you, one prayer request above all others, I think my prayer for myself and for you would be for spiritual desire. That I would have a consuming desire to know God, and that you would have that as well.

I think it was A. W. Tozer who made this simple statement that has meant so much to me, I suppose, in the past 15 years of my life. He said, you will be as holy as you want to be. Sometimes we complicate the Christian experience, don't we? We make it mystical or we make it technical.

Really, it's very simple. You will be as holy as you want to be. Spiritual desire, wanting God, wanting a closeness with God, is the key to everything.

The Lord Jesus said, in the middle of that manifesto of his, at the beginning of the Sermon of the Mount, Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. You want satisfaction as you move away from Motherwell later this afternoon. You want to be satisfied in your spiritual experience.

Of course you do. Of course I do. Well, here is satisfaction guaranteed.

Jesus doesn't say you may be satisfied. He doesn't say you'll have an inconsistent experience. Someday it'll be good, someday not so good.

He says you will be satisfied. What is the key to guaranteed satisfaction? Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness. That's the key.

If we know what it is to hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will know deep satisfaction in our lives. Now the image that Jesus had in his mind, no doubt, as he made that statement on the Mount, was of the man traversing the desert, and the sandstorm blows up. And he takes his banus and he puts it around his face, and the sand is filling his nostrils and his mouth.

There's a dryness, he's lost, there's a hunger. And Jesus says when you get like that, in your desire for me, and for my Father, and for righteousness, when you become as desperate as that lost man in the desert, then you will be satisfied. And I hope you're going to go away from Motherwell this weekend with an increased spiritual desire.

I long for that for you more than anything else. That you will go away from this place with a desire for God and for righteousness. That's what Paul says here.

He says I used to live for certain things. The normal things that my peers lived for, those were the things I lived for. But there's been this total transformation.

Now my one consuming desire is to know Christ, and to know his righteousness. Now of course there's one sense in which Paul was entirely confident that he had received once and for all the righteousness of God by faith. He knew that nothing could be added to that righteousness.

Nothing could be subtracted from it. And I hope you're resting in that experience yourself this afternoon. I hope you're not still trying to achieve righteousness before God by your own endeavors.

Trying to somehow please God by the quality and the regularity of your quiet time or whatever it might be. I hope you've moved on from that. I hope that your quiet time, I hope that the obedience in your Christian life is a response in love to God rather than somehow trying to appease God or to make yourself righteous in his presence.

We have received the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul knew that. He was able to write to the Romans.

There's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. I hope you're going to go away from Motherwell with that ringing reality in your ears and in your heart. No condemnation.

Doesn't matter what Satan the accuser of the brethren says. No condemnation. I'm in Christ Jesus.

Sometimes you can come to a conference like this and you can go away feeling devastated. That's happened to me a number of times. Some message you just feel you can't live up to that at all.

The marvelous experience of some other Christian who's shared with you and you feel so small and insignificant and such an utter failure in comparison. Maybe the standard which has been proclaimed during the conference leaves you feeling devastated. Don't allow that.

That's Satan, the accuser of the brethren. Paul could say, and I hope you can say, no condemnation. I am in Christ Jesus.

But whilst that work of justification can never be added to, never be subtracted from, Paul saw the work of sanctification, the work of becoming holy, he saw that work as being progressive and continuous. And so he continues with his testimony in verse 10, a verse which, probably more than any other verse in the Bible, helps us to understand this dynamic man, Paul the Apostle. If you want to get to the heart of Paul the Apostle, here it is.

I want to know Christ. That's not very sophisticated, complicated, is it? Not very mystical. Let's keep it simple.

I want to know Christ. That's what was important to the Apostle Paul. Oh, he loved to plant churches.

He loved to teach young men like Timothy and Silas. But there was one thing more important than anything else to him. It didn't matter whether he was preaching or it didn't matter whether he was in prison.

He could follow this one great desire. I want to know Christ. And I'm going to be specific, says Paul.

There are three things I'm looking for. I want to know the power of his resurrection. I want to know fellowship in sharing with his sufferings.

And I want to become like Jesus in the way in which he died. Now this consuming ambition to know Christ continued with Paul throughout his life. There is one sense in which Paul was never a satisfied man.

There's another sense in which he was totally satisfied. There's another sense in which he was never satisfied. He always wanted to be making further, greater progress.

He always wanted to be moving on. When I look at this aspect of Paul's life, I'm reminding him of the simple epitaph of a Swiss mountain guide high up on one of the alpine peaks are these three words. He died climbing.

He died climbing. Now I believe that's how Paul finished his life. You read his last letter, 2 Timothy.

You read the last chapter of that letter and you'll see how this man died. He died climbing. He was still wanting to go on.

He was still wanting to move forward. There was still more for him to know, more for him to experience. I want to know Christ.

And the biblical illustrations of the Christian life underline that this should be a principle. We are described in the Bible as plants in the field of the Lord, constantly reaching upwards for more and for more light. We are told that we've been born into the family of God where there are babes, little children, young men, and fathers in Christ Jesus.

There should be that constant progression in the family into which we have been born. We are described as pilgrims, as warriors, as wrestlers. All of these words are descriptive of movement, of progress.

And in this very chapter here in Philippians 3, we have Paul's most common illustration of the athlete in the race, moving forward with the tape ever in view. If the biblical illustrations of the Christian life call us to

constant progress, then the exhortations do the same. We are exhorted to grow in grace.

We are exhorted, 2 Peter 1, to add to our faith. God has given us, Peter says, everything that we need for life and godliness. God doesn't sell us short.

But we have to be constantly adding to our faith. We are told in Scripture that we are to follow on to know the Lord. And there are many similar examples.

So before we just look at three points in this passage together, I want you to accept before God the general overall challenge of this chapter. The overall challenge of the chapter is really summed up in five words in verse 13. Paul says, I'm straining towards what is ahead.

I want to ask you this afternoon as we come to the end of this conference, would that be descriptive of your Christian life? Not when we're all together in conference in Motherwell. But on a Monday morning or a Tuesday afternoon, would this be descriptive of your Christian life? Is this where you're at? Are you straining forward every day to what lies ahead? Saint Jerome used to say, happy is he who makes daily progress, who does not consider what he did yesterday, but is always considering what advances he can make today. What's your goal for 1989 in your spiritual experience? Is it clear? What's your goal in Bible reading? Do you have at the very least the goal to read this book through once a year? Surely if we're men and women of God, we'd want to be men and women of his word, wouldn't we? If this is what the living God has left with us, if this is what he wants to say to us, then surely we would read it once a year, minimum.

But I know from past experience, if I was to ask you to raise your hand, if you're reading the Bible through every year, there would be a very small percentage of you who would raise your hand. Sometimes I wonder just how serious we are about this Christian business, or whether we're really just playing the game. We come along to conferences like this and we have a great time and everything looks great, but I wonder how many of you are reading this Bible as much as you're watching your television.

I wonder how many of you do that. As many hours in the book as you do in front of the screen. I think people who've got the balance right there are at last getting serious about their Christian life.

That's the overall challenge of the chapter. Do these five words describe you straining towards what is ahead? A. W. Chaucer says in another of his works, refuse to be average. Do you just settle down to be the average Christian? You've got the average number of attendances at church, and you're involved a little bit in this and a little bit in that, and you're even one of those keen ones who comes to an OM conference.

You're just accepted average. Chaucer says, refuse to be average. The Apostle Paul says, I'm straining for what is ahead.

I hope that's your spiritual posture this afternoon. Now look here at three things which Paul says, three things which will help us, I think, as we press on from this conference to what lies ahead. The first thing that Paul does is he estimates his own present condition.

Look at verse 12. Not that I have already obtained all this. I am not perfect.

Verse 13, I do not consider that I have taken hold of perfection. Now notice that word in verse 13, the word consider. It's a word which means Paul has taken careful stock.

He has made a careful estimate. He has come to a considered conclusion. Please turn the cassette over now.

Do not fast wind it in either direction. Christian experience. Now think for a moment of the man who wrote these words.

He is the man who soon would become a martyr for the cause of Christ. He was one of the Lord's great apostles. He could actually urge others to be imitators of him, as he was an imitator of Jesus Christ.

What a man. And yet when he took stock, when he sat down and really thought about it, he said, I haven't arrived. There's more to know.

There's more to experience. I have not been made perfect. Now I don't know about you, but that motivates me to do two things.

Firstly, it motivates me to do my own stock take. And I want to ask you to do that. Maybe even as you go home this afternoon, to carry out your own spiritual stock take.

How are you doing? Alan mentioned the book by that title to us this morning. I would underline his recommendation. Stuart Dinan's book, subtitled, 24 Checklists on Spiritual Growth and Service.

Get hold of a copy. Get away into some corner somewhere and do a stock take. Find out where you're really at in your Christian life.

We don't do very much of this today. If you read the writings of the Puritans of a couple of centuries ago, you'll find that spiritual self-examination was a regular part of their discipleship. They would go aside and they would examine their lives.

They would look before God at where they were at in their Christian experience. I challenge you to take a stock take this afternoon. But secondly, Paul's testimony should forever deliver us from spiritual complacency.

If this man did not consider himself to have arrived spiritually, if he was not satisfied with his spiritual progress, then how much less me? How much less you? But spiritual complacency does occur, doesn't it? It comes as a dreadful cloud over us from time to time. Where does it come from, spiritual complacency? It comes when we forget a number of things. When we forget, for example, the awful holiness of God, then we can easily become complacent.

There is a danger in our generation, I think particularly, to become over-familiar with God. It's lovely to have that intimate Abba-Father relationship with God. That's lovely and that's important.

But at the same time, it is constantly essential to remember the awesome holiness of a God who is a consuming fire. We cannot meddle with God. We must take God seriously.

Spiritual complacency settles in upon us when we do not have a biblical vision, a biblical understanding of the God with whom we have to do. Spiritual complacency settles in on us when we begin to forget the law of God, the holiness of his law, the stringency of his law. When we forget God, when we misinterpret his law, we are in trouble.

It also begins to settle in upon us when we forget the seriousness of sin. Do you realize that every time you sin, according to the book of Hebrews, you crucify again the Son of God and you make of him an open shame? Repentance, you know, is a very serious business. It's not just a shrug of the shoulders, I failed, Lord, help me, forgive me.

Repentance is a serious business. It's realizing the God against whom you have sinned, the holiness of the law which you have broken, the injustice which you have done against the person of Jesus Christ. It is to feel that.

It is to turn from it with a steady, definite determination not to fail again. These things can cause the dreaded cloud of spiritual complacency to settle in upon us so that we will settle down and become average Christians. Paul says, I haven't arrived, that's where I'm at.

And then the second thing is, he tells us his attitude to his past. Look at verse 13. I forget, says Paul, what is behind.

No, he doesn't mean by that that he forgets the immense mercy of God that he's enjoyed. He doesn't mean that he forgets the seriousness of the sins that he has committed. Remember the analogy is of the Greek games.

Imagine the athlete. He's done 600 meters of an 800 meters race and he knows he's well out in front. So he begins to look behind.

He begins to praise himself. There are three, four, five, six runners behind him and he's reveling in it. But what happens? With the backward look, he loses speed.

Possibly direction. And if he's not very careful while he's praising himself, others will sweep past and leave him totally defeated. Lot's wife, of course, should remain to every Christian as a constant warning.

Here she was, escaping from danger, well on the way to safety. But she looked back and with the backward look, everything was lost. Now the Christian race is just like every other race.

You can't just settle on your laurels. You can't just think, you know, I've done great for the last 12 months. I've done great for the last 12 years.

And you don't start looking back on all the achievements that you have so far accomplished. Forgetting those things, says Paul, which are behind. The race of life is not complete until you have breasted the tape.

Just turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, if you've still got your Bible open. 1 Corinthians 10. Paul is reminding here the Corinthian church of the lessons we should learn from the experiences of the children of Israel.

And what a solemn lesson Paul brings before the Corinthians from the Israelite experience. Look at verse 1. I don't want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea. In other words, God's Old Testament people all received the blessings of God.

And verses 2 to 4 relate further blessings which they all enjoyed. But then read verse 5. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them. Their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Now I'm told that that's a very graphic picture in the Hebrew language which Paul is explaining to the Corinthians. He's picturing the wilderness as being strewn with heaps of corpses of the children of Israel. A very solemn picture indeed.

Here are a privileged people who are enjoying the presence of God and the blessing of God and yet they fell by the wayside. And Paul is very clear, very clear with regard to the lesson that you and I should learn from that. Look at verse 12.

If you think that you are standing, be careful that you don't fall away. Don't be fooled, says Paul. Here were a nation who had enjoyed the blessing of God.

They'd actually passed through the sea that God had divided. They knew the miraculous power of God in their own experience. And yet they fell by the wayside.

There were heaps of corpses throughout the desert. So if you think you're standing, take heed lest you fall. Monday of last week I received a phone call.

A young girl in a time of spiritual revival on one of our teams in another part of the world had come out with confession of immorality with a Christian leader in England. I had the job of confronting that brother last week about his indiscretion and his sin. Yesterday afternoon at this very conference I went to speak to someone who is no longer here.

I said, how are things at your church? The church I visited a number of times. And I knew from the answer things were not well. So I pressed a little further.

I said, come on, what's happened? Three men in the church, one an elder, two deacons, all gone off with other women in that church. Church totally devastated. God has been doing great things there for the last ten years.

Maybe those people thought that they were standing. And they began to look back. Ten years of great achievements.

One of them particularly is a fine preacher. And God had used the man to bring people to Christ that I know personally. Did he begin to look back and count his achievements? His eyes were off the master, off the finishing tape.

The marathon was not ended and yet he was relaxing. Paul says, I haven't arrived. And I'm not going to look back.

I'll forget those things which are behind because I know the subtlety of the enemy. And I know that I can fall just as easy as those children of Israel who enjoyed so much blessing were left strewn, heaps of corpses throughout the desert. And so we come thirdly and finally to that statement which I mentioned earlier, which gives us Paul's present position.

He says, I'm straining towards what is ahead. Again, the commentators will tell you that the verb used there in the original is a very graphic verb indeed. Picturing the runner straining every nerve and muscle as he keeps on running with all his might towards the goal.

His hands stretched out, says one commentator, as if to grasp it. I ask you again, does that describe you? Now let's be honest at the end of the conference. When you think of your desire for fellowship with other

Christians, when you think of your evangelistic involvement, when you think of your prayer involvement and your involvement with Scripture, is this descriptive of you? Are you like the athlete getting towards the end of 26 miles, 385 yards and you're straining for the tape? Is that descriptive of you? Or are you relaxing, looking around, you're looking back? Paul says, I press forward, I strain because I haven't arrived and I know the pitfalls and I must move on.

Notice the singleness of mind and purpose. This one thing I do. He's got one thing in his mind.

Now he's got these games in his mind again. He's got the prize for which God has called him heavenwards in Christ Jesus. You see, at the end of the race in the Greek games, when you crossed the tape, you kept running.

You ran across the track. You ran up the steps of the grandstand. I'm told it was the hardest part of the whole race.

And there was the emperor or the local chief and he had his garland of flowers to put around your neck. As the athlete came towards the tape, he may well for one moment lift his eyes from the tape and look up to the man in charge who would give him his garland of flowers. And Paul says, I've got my eyes on a reward as well.

The things of this world are secondary to me, says Paul, because I can see the prize for which God is calling me heavenward. In Romans 8, Paul considers something else. He says, I consider, I've taken stock, same word, that my present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory which will be revealed in us.

The athlete can accept the pain, he can accept the suffering of the race, if the prize is clearly in view. What are you living for? What are you living for? What prize do you really want? Material gain? Is that what you're after? You're willing to work day and night for material progress? Is that your prize? Go on, be honest. Is that your prize? Is that what you want? You want to be accepted by the group in your university or your school or your church even? Your business? You want to be one of the boys? Is that what keeps you going? Remember that little story which Jesus told, one of his great parables.

The story of the man who was digging a field. Just a little parable, one verse, Matthew 13, 44. You think about it.

A man digging a field, he finds some treasure, covers the treasure over. He goes home. This is a modern translation.

He puts the for sale notice up at the end of his drive. He puts his Mercedes car into the local car auction. It would be a foolish thing to do, but he sells it in some way or another.

He gets rid of his video and his television and so on. And the neighbours all gather round and they say, have you seen what's happening to Fred? Very sad, isn't it? He must have really gone off the deep end. He's selling everything.

It's tragic. Can't we get him to hospital? Surely some psychiatrist can help him. They had no understanding of that man.

Why? Why? They had no understanding of the treasure. They hadn't seen the treasure, so they couldn't understand the man. Have you seen the treasure? What are you living for? This world, 70 years, 80 years if you have strength.

Is that what you're living for? You've got your eyes on the grandstand. You're running the race with the Lord Jesus in front of your eyes. The garland of flowers that he will give to the victors.

It's time to get serious, isn't it? With God. Serious about life. Time to get our priorities clear.

Time to be finished with superficiality. At the end of this conference, say with the Apostle Paul, Yes, I used to live for all the things my peers lived for. But there's been a transformation in my life.

I've now got one consuming ambition. I want to know Christ. I haven't arrived.

I'm not going to look back. I'm going to keep the tape and the grandstand in view. And with every muscle in my spiritual body, I am going to strain forward until I breast that tape.

And hear those words, well done, good and faithful servant. Refuse to be average. Let's pray together.

Let's just have a moment of quietness at the end of this conference. So that God can write his word, not just the words I've spoken in the last half hour, but the words you've heard throughout this weekend, clearly up on your mind. Maybe you want to make some response to him and to his word, just in the quietness of your own heart.

Father, we have in our minds a picture of the Lord Jesus with that cross on his back, struggling through the streets of Jerusalem. We remember the word that he spoke. His face was set towards that city.

I must go to Jerusalem. He knew everything that was before him, and yet he must go. There was no way he could turn back.

The goal, the prize was in his mind. And Lord, we were that prize. He was going to Jerusalem for me, for every one of us.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for going the whole way for me and for every one of us. Thank you for never turning back, not once, Lord, but you went the whole way. Lord, how can we ever think of doing anything else when we survey that wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died? Love so amazing, so divine, demands our hearts, our lives, our all.

Help us, Lord, help us to hunger and thirst after you, to refuse to be average, but to strain forward with everything that we have, to know you and to do your will. For Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.

Right, I'd like you to turn to Philippians chapter 3. I'm sure when you think of the subject of pressing on, that's probably where your mind goes to. Philippians chapter 3, verse 12. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do. Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.

And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

For as I have often told you before, and now say again, even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction. Their God is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame.

Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies, so that they will be like his glorious body. Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the privilege of being together this weekend. Thank you for the time and the desire you've given us to be together.

Thank you for the freedom we've had to meet and hear your word and sing your praise quite freely. Thank you, Lord, for everything you've said to us. But, oh God, we appeal to you this afternoon that what we've been through this weekend together might not just be an information exercise, might not just be an academic exercise, but, Lord, we do pray that it will be a life-changing experience.

We pray that many of us will look back to this weekend, later in our lives, and see this weekend as an opportunity we took to take a step fresh, a step of faith, a step of commitment. Lord, we pray that even this afternoon, in this final session, you'll help us to seal some issue with you. In Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, this third chapter of Philippians is a chapter of personal testimony. The Apostle Paul has explained in the opening verses, which I'm sure are very familiar verses to you, how all the things he had previously considered to be so important, and which other young men of his generation would certainly have considered to be highly important, he now considered as loss or refuse.

And he just had one consuming ambition in life. You can read about that in verse 8. He says, I consider everything else a loss, compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. There'd been this transformation in the life of this man, Saul of Tarsus, who used to live for many things, things which others of his generation lived for, had become Paul of Tarsus.

There'd been this transformation in his whole life, and the one consuming ambition now was to know Christ Jesus, my Lord. And verse 9, to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. Now, I just want you to look at those two verses, 8 and 9, for a moment, and I want you to recognize the spiritual desire that comes through that statement.

I consider everything a loss compared to this, this consuming, driving ambition in Paul's life, to know Jesus Christ. You know, if I pray for anything more than any other in my life, and if I was to pray for you, one prayer request above all others, I think my prayer for myself and for you would be for spiritual desire, that I would have a consuming desire to know God, and that you would have that as well. I think it was A. W. Tozer who made this simple statement that has meant so much to me, I suppose, in the past 15 years of my life.

He said, you will be as holy as you want to be. Sometimes we complicate the Christian experience, don't we? We make it mystical or we make it technical. Really, it's very simple.

You will be as holy as you want to be. Spiritual desire, wanting God, wanting a closeness with God, is the key to everything. The Lord Jesus said in the middle of that manifesto of his at the beginning of the Sermon of the Mount, Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

You want satisfaction as you move away from Motherwell later this afternoon. You want to be satisfied in your spiritual experience. Of course you do.

Of course I do. Well, here is satisfaction guaranteed. Jesus doesn't say you may be satisfied.

He doesn't say you'll have an inconsistent experience. Someday it'll be good, someday not so good. He says you will be satisfied.

What is the key to guaranteed satisfaction? Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness. That's the key. If we know what it is to hunger and thirst for righteousness, we will know deep satisfaction in our lives.

Now the image that Jesus had in his mind, no doubt, as he made that statement on the Mount, was of the man traversing the desert and the sandstorm blows up. And he takes his banus and he puts it around his face and the sand is filling his nostrils and his mouth. There's a dryness, he's lost, there's a hunger.

And Jesus says when you get like that, in your desire for me and for my Father and for righteousness, when you become as desperate as that lost man in the desert, then you will be satisfied. And I hope you're going to go away from Motherwell this weekend with an increased spiritual desire. I long for that for you more than anything else.

That you will go away from this place with a desire for God and for righteousness. That's what Paul says here. He says, I used to live for certain things.

The normal things that my peers lived for, those were the things I lived for. But there's been this total transformation. Now my one consuming desire is to know Christ and to know his righteousness.

Now of course there's one sense in which Paul was entirely confident that he had received once and for all the righteousness of God by faith. He knew that nothing could be added to that righteousness. Nothing could be subtracted from it.

And I hope you're resting in that experience yourself this afternoon. I hope you're not still trying to achieve righteousness before God by your own endeavors. Trying to somehow please God by the quality and the regularity of your quiet time or whatever it might be.

I hope you've moved on from that. I hope that your quiet time, I hope that the obedience in your Christian life is a response in love to God rather than somehow trying to appease God or to make yourself righteous in his presence. We have received the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul knew that. He was able to write to the Romans. There's now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

I hope you're going to go away from Motherwell with that ringing reality in your ears and in your heart. No condemnation. Doesn't matter what Satan the accuser of the brethren says.

No condemnation. I'm in Christ Jesus. Sometimes you can come to a conference like this and you can go away feeling devastated.

That's happened to me a number of times. Some message you just feel you can't live up to that at all. The marvelous experience of some other Christian who shared with you and you feel so small and insignificant and such an utter failure in comparison.

Maybe the standard which has been proclaimed during the conference leaves you feeling devastated. Don't allow that. That's Satan.

The accuser of the brethren. Paul could say, and I hope you can say, No condemnation. I am in Christ Jesus.

But whilst that work of justification can never be added to, never be subtracted from, Paul saw the work of sanctification, the work of becoming holy. He saw that work as being progressive and continuous. And so he continues with his testimony in verse 10.

A verse which, probably more than any other verse in the Bible, helps us to understand this dynamic man, Paul the Apostle. If you want to get to the heart of Paul the Apostle, here it is. I want to know Christ.

That's not very sophisticated, complicated, is it? Not very mystical. Let's keep it simple. I want to know Christ.

That's what was important to the Apostle Paul. Oh, he loved to plant churches. He loved to teach young men like Timothy and Silas.

But there was one thing more important than anything else to him. It didn't matter whether he was preaching, or it didn't matter whether he was in prison. He could follow this one great desire.

I want to know Christ. And I'm going to be specific, says Paul. There are three things I'm looking for.

I want to know the power of his resurrection. I want to know fellowship in sharing with his sufferings. And I want to become like Jesus in the way in which he died.

Now this consuming ambition to know Christ continued with Paul throughout his life. There is one sense in which Paul was never a satisfied man. There's another sense in which he was totally satisfied.

There's another sense in which he was never satisfied. He always wanted to be making further, greater progress. He always wanted to be moving on.

When I look at this aspect of Paul's life, I'm reminding him of the simple epitaph of a Swiss mountain guide, high up on one of the alpine peaks, are these three words. He died climbing. He died climbing.

I believe that's how Paul finished his life. You read his last letter, 2 Timothy. You read the last chapter of that letter, and you'll see how this man died.

He died climbing. He was still wanting to go on. He was still wanting to move forward.

There was still more for him to know, more for him to experience. I want to know Christ. The biblical illustrations of the Christian life underline that this should be a principle.

We are described in the Bible as plants in the field of the Lord, constantly reaching upwards for more and for more light. We are told that we've been born into the family of God, where there are babes, little children, young men, and fathers in Christ Jesus. There should be that constant progression in the family into which we have been born.

We are described as pilgrims, as warriors, as wrestlers. All of these words are descriptive of movement, of progress. In this very chapter here in Philippians 3, we have Paul's most common illustration of the athlete in the race, moving forward with the tape ever in view.

If the biblical illustrations of the Christian life call us to constant progress, then the exhortations do the same. We are exhorted to grow in grace. We are exhorted, 2 Peter 1, to add to our faith.

God has given us, Peter says, everything that we need for life and godliness. God doesn't sell us short. But we have to be constantly adding to our faith.

We are told in Scripture that we are to follow on to know the Lord. And there are many similar examples. So before we just look at three points in this passage together, I want you to accept before God the general overall challenge of this chapter.

The overall challenge of the chapter is really summed up in five words in verse 13. Paul says, I'm straining towards what is ahead. I want to ask you this afternoon, as we come to the end of this conference, would that be descriptive of your Christian life? Not when we're all together in conference in Motherwell.

But on a Monday morning or a Tuesday afternoon, would this be descriptive of your Christian life? Is this where you're at? Are you straining forward every day to what lies ahead? Saint Jerome used to say, Happy is he who makes daily progress, who does not consider what he did yesterday, but is always considering what advances he can make today. What's your goal for 1989 in your spiritual experience? Is it clear? What's your goal in Bible reading? Do you have at the very least the goal to read this book through once a year? Surely if we're men and women of God, we'd want to be men and women of his word, wouldn't we? If this is what the living God has left with us, if this is what he wants to say to us, then surely we would read it once a year, minimum. But I know from past experience, if I was to ask you to raise your hand, if you're reading the Bible through every year, there would be a very small percentage of you who would raise your hand.

Sometimes I wonder just how serious we are about this Christian business. Or whether we're really just playing the game. We come along to conferences like this, and we have a great time, and everything looks great.

But I wonder how many of you are reading this Bible as much as you're watching your television. I wonder how many of you do that. As many hours in the book as you do in front of the screen.

I think people who've got the balance right there are at last getting serious about their Christian life. That's the overall challenge of the chapter. Do these five words describe you straining towards what is ahead? A. W. Chaucer says in another of his works, refuse to be average.

Do you just settle down to be the average Christian? Or you've got the average number of attendances at church, and you're involved a little bit in this and a little bit in that, and you're even one of those keen ones who comes to an OM conference. Have you just accepted average? Chaucer says, refuse to be average. The Apostle Paul says, I'm straining for what is ahead.

I hope that's your spiritual posture this afternoon. Now look here at three things which Paul says. Three things which will help us, I think, as we press on from this conference to what lies ahead.

The first thing that Paul does is he estimates his own present condition. Look at verse 12. Not that I have already obtained all this.

I am not perfect. Verse 13, I do not consider that I have taken hold of perfection. Now notice that word in verse 13, the word consider.

It's a word which means Paul has taken careful stock. He has made a careful estimate. He has come to a considered conclusion.

Now think for a moment of the man who wrote these words. He is the man who soon would become a martyr for the cause of Christ. He was one of the Lord's great apostles.

He could actually urge others to be imitators of him, as he was an imitator of Jesus Christ. What a man. And yet when he took stock, when he sat down and really thought about it, he said, I haven't arrived.

There's more to know. There's more to experience. I have not been made perfect.

Now I don't know about you, but that motivates me to do two things. Firstly, it motivates me to do my own stock take. And I want to ask you to do that.

Maybe even as you go home this afternoon, to carry out your own spiritual stock take. How are you doing? Alan mentioned the book by that title to us this morning. I would underline his recommendation.

Stuart Dinan's book, subtitled, 24 Checklists on Spiritual Growth and Service. Get hold of a copy. Get away into some corner somewhere and do a stock take.

Find out where you're really at in your Christian life. We don't do very much of this today. If you read the writings of the Puritans a couple of centuries ago, you'll find that spiritual self-examination was a regular part of their discipleship.

They would go aside and they would examine their lives. They would look before God at where they were at in their Christian experience. I challenge you to take a stock take this afternoon.

But secondly, Paul's testimony should forever deliver us from spiritual complacency. If this man did not consider himself to have arrived spiritually, if he was not satisfied with his spiritual progress, then how much less me? How much less you? But spiritual complacency does occur, doesn't it? It comes as a dreadful cloud over us from time to time. Where does it come from, spiritual complacency? It comes when we forget a number of things.

When we forget, for example, the awful holiness of God, then we can easily become complacent. There is a danger in our generation, I think particularly, to become over-familiar with God. It's lovely to have that intimate Abba-Father relationship with God.

That's lovely and that's important. But at the same time, it is constantly essential to remember the awesome holiness of a God who is a consuming fire. We cannot meddle with God.

We must take God seriously. Spiritual complacency settles in upon us when we do not have a biblical vision, a biblical understanding of the God with whom we have to do. Spiritual complacency settles in on us when we begin to forget the law of God, the holiness of his law, the stringency of his law.

When we forget God, when we misinterpret his law, we are in trouble. It also begins to settle in upon us when we forget the seriousness of sin. Do you realize that every time you sin, according to the book of Hebrews, you crucify again the Son of God and you make of him an open shame? Repentance, you know, is a very serious business.

It's not just a shrug of the shoulders, I failed, Lord, help me, forgive me. Repentance is a serious business. It's realizing the God against whom you have sinned, the holiness of the law which you have broken, the injustice which you have done against the person of Jesus Christ.

It is to feel that. It is to turn from it with a steady, definite determination not to fail again. These things can cause the dreaded cloud of spiritual complacency to settle in upon us so that we will settle down and become average Christians.

Paul says, I haven't arrived, that's where I'm at. And then the second thing is, he tells us his attitude to his past. Look at verse 13.

I forget, says Paul, what is behind. Now, he doesn't mean by that that he forgets the immense mercy of God that he's enjoyed. He doesn't mean that he forgets the seriousness of the sins that he has committed.

Remember, the analogy is of the Greek games. Imagine the athlete. He's done 600 meters of an 800 meters race and he knows he's well out in front.

So he begins to look behind. He begins to praise himself. There are three, four, five, six runners behind him and he's reveling in it.

But what happens? With the backward look, he loses speed, possibly direction. And if he's not very careful while he's praising himself, others will sweep past and leave him totally defeated. Lot's wife, of course, should remain, to every Christian, as a constant warning.

Here she was, escaping from danger, well on the way to safety. But she looked back, and with the backward look, everything was lost. Now, the Christian race is just like every other race.

You can't just settle on your laurels. You can't just think, you know, I've done great for the last 12 months. I've done great for the last 12 years.

And you don't start looking back on all the achievements that you have so far accomplished. Forgetting those things, says Paul, which are behind. The race of life is not complete until you have breasted the tape.

Just turn back to 1 Corinthians chapter 10, if you've still got your Bible open. 1 Corinthians 10. Paul is reminding here, the Corinthian church, of the lessons we should learn from the experiences of the children of Israel.

And what a solemn lesson Paul brings before the Corinthians from the Israelite experience. Look at verse 1. I don't want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud, and they all passed through the sea. In other words, God's Old Testament people all received the blessings of

God.

And verses 2 to 4 relate further blessings, which they all enjoyed. But then read verse 5. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them. Their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Now I'm told that that's a very graphic picture in the Hebrew language, which Paul is explaining to the Corinthians. He's picturing the wilderness as being strewn with heaps of corpses of the children of Israel. A very solemn picture indeed.

Here are a privileged people who are enjoying the presence of God and the blessing of God, and yet they fell by the wayside. And Paul is very clear, very clear, with regard to the lesson that you and I should learn from that. Look at verse 12.

If you think that you are standing, be careful that you don't fall away. Don't be fools, says Paul. Here were a nation who had enjoyed the blessing of God.

They'd actually passed through the sea that God had divided. They knew the miraculous power of God in their own experience, and yet they fell by the wayside. There were heaps of corpses throughout the desert.

So if you think you're standing, take heed lest you fall. Monday of last week I received a phone call. A young girl in a time of spiritual revival on one of our teams in another part of the world had come out with confession of immorality with a Christian leader in England.

I had the job of confronting that brother last week about his indiscretion and his sin. Yesterday afternoon at this very conference I went to speak to someone who is no longer here. I said, how are things at your church? The church I visited a number of times, and I knew from the answer things were not well, so I pressed a little further.

I said, come on, what's happened? Three men in the church, one an elder, two deacons, all gone off with other women in that church. Church totally devastated. God has been doing great things there for the last ten years.

Maybe those people thought that they were standing. And they began to look back. Ten years of great achievements, one of them particularly is a fine preacher, and God had used the man to bring people to Christ that I know personally.

Then he began to look back and count his achievements. His eyes were off the master, off the finishing tape. The marathon was not ended, and yet he was relaxing.

Paul says, I haven't arrived. And I'm not going to look back. I'll forget those things which are behind because I know the subtlety of the enemy.

And I know that I can fall just as easy as those children of Israel who enjoyed so much blessing were left strewn, heaps of corpses throughout the desert. And so we come thirdly and finally to that statement which I mentioned earlier, which gives us Paul's present position. He says, I'm straining towards what is ahead.

Again, the commentators will tell you that the verb used there in the original is a very graphic verb indeed. Picturing the runner straining every nerve and muscle as he keeps on running with all his might towards

the goal. His hands stretched out, says one commentator, as if to grasp it.

I ask you again, does that describe you? Now let's be honest at the end of the conference. When you think of your desire for fellowship with other Christians, when you think of your evangelistic involvement, when you think of your prayer involvement and your involvement with Scripture, is this descriptive of you? Are you like the athlete getting towards the end of 26 miles, 385 yards and you're straining for the tape? Is that descriptive of you? Or are you relaxing, looking around you, looking back? Paul says, I press forward, I strain, because I haven't arrived and I know the pitfalls and I must move on. Notice the singleness of mind and purpose.

This one thing I do. He's got one thing in his mind. Now he's got these games in his mind again.

He's got the prize for which God has called him heavenwards in Christ Jesus. You see at the end of the race in the Greek games, when you crossed the tape, you kept running. You ran across the track.

You ran up the steps of the grandstand. I'm told it was the hardest part of the whole race. And there was the emperor or the local chief and he had his garland of flowers to put around your neck.

As the athlete came towards the tape, he may well for one moment lift his eyes from the tape and look at the man in charge who would give him his garland of flowers. And Paul says, I've got my eyes on a reward as well. The things of this world are secondary to me, says Paul, because I can see the prize for which God is calling me heavenward.

In Romans 8, Paul considers something else. He says, I consider, I've taken stock, same word, that my present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory which will be revealed in us. The athlete can accept the pain.

He can accept the suffering of the race if the prize is clearly in view. What are you living for? What are you living for? What prize do you really want? Material gain? Is that what you're after? You're willing to work day and night for material progress. Is that your prize? Go on, be honest.

Is that your prize? Is that what you want? You want to be accepted by the group in your university or your school or your church even. Your business, you want to be one of the boys. Is that what keeps you going? Remember that little story which Jesus told, one of his great parables.

The story of the man who was digging a field. Just a little parable, one verse, Matthew 13, 44. You think about it.

A man digging a field. He finds some treasure. Covers the treasure over.

He goes home. This is a modern translation. He puts the for sale notice up at the end of his drive.

He puts his Mercedes car into the local car auction. It would be a foolish thing to do but he sells it in some way or another. Gets rid of his video and his television and so on.

And the neighbors all gather around and they say, have you seen what's happening to Fred? Very sad, isn't it? He must have really gone off to the deep end. He's selling everything. It's tragic.

Can't we get him to a hospital? Surely some psychiatrist can help him. They had no understanding of that man. Why? Why? They had no understanding of the treasure.

They hadn't seen the treasure so they couldn't understand the man. Have you seen the treasure? What are you living for? This world, 70 years, 80 years, if you have strength. Is that what you're living for? Or you've got your eyes on the grandstand and you're running the race with the Lord Jesus in front of your eyes and the garland of flowers that he will give to the victors.

It's time to get serious, isn't it? With God. Serious about life. Time to get our priorities clear.

Time to be finished with superficiality. And at the end of this conference say with the Apostle Paul, Yes, I used to live for all the things my peers lived for. But there's been a transformation in my life.

I've now got one consuming ambition. I want to know Christ. I haven't arrived.

I'm not going to look back. I'm going to keep the tape and the grandstand in view and with every muscle in my spiritual body I am going to strain forward until I breast that tape. And hear those words well done good and faithful servant.

Refuse to be average. Let's pray together. Just have a moment of quietness at the end of this conference so that God can write his word not just the words I've spoken in the last half hour but the words you've heard throughout this weekend clearly up on your mind.

Maybe you want to make some response to him and to his word just in the quietness of your own heart. Father, we have in our minds a picture of the Lord Jesus with that cross on his back struggling through the streets of Jerusalem. We remember the word that he spoke.

His face was set towards that city. I must go to Jerusalem. He knew everything that was before him and yet he must go.

There was no way he could turn back. The goal, the prize was in his mind. And Lord, we were that prize.

He was going to Jerusalem for me for every one of us. Thank you Lord Jesus for going the whole way for me and for every one of us. Thank you for never turning back not once Lord but you went the whole way.

Lord, how can we ever think of doing anything else when we survey that wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died. Love so amazing, so divine demands our hearts. Our lives are all.

Help us Lord, help us to hunger and thirst after you. To refuse to be average but to strain forward with everything that we have to know you and to do your will. For Jesus' sake we pray.

Amen.

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