

Pressing On

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[0 : 00] If you don't know me, if you're visiting, my name is Niels, one of the elders here. It's, yeah, welcoming you more formally. It's great to be with you. It's great to bring you God's Word.

In a moment, in a moment, Cecilia is going to read. If you've been doing our Bible reading plan that started off, we started the year with Philippians. It's just nice to have this really encouraging New Testament book at the start of the year.

It's a great letter, one of Paul's favorite churches. And so I thought, why don't I speak on that? So in a moment, I'll be speaking on Philippians 3, this wonderful chapter of Christian basics that will be good at the start of the year.

But Cecilia is going to read for us in a moment. Let me first pray. Father, thank you that you are the God who speaks, the God who loves us, the God who comes into our life.

Pray that you would speak to each one of us now as Cecilia reads. And we hear those words that you spoke back then, that you're still speaking now. And as I then try to explain it, speak to each of our hearts, no matter where we are at, no matter what this year has been like so far for us.

[1 : 13] Please speak to us, encourage us, and help us to press on with you. In Jesus' name. Amen. Today's scripture reading is Philippians chapter 3, verse 1 to chapter 4, verse 1.

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me, and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs.

Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate of the flesh. For we are the circumcision. We worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to Sil, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

[2 : 27] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish. In order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings because, like him in his death, that by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus had made me his own.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goals of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will review that also to you. Not only let us hold true to what we have attained.

[3 : 59] Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you, and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and glory is their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. This is the word of God.

Amen. Great. Thank you for reading, Cecilia. And so, yeah, there's a lot in this passage. We're not going to look at everyone, everything, but wonderful things here.

Now, Christianity is, I think, it's the weirdest religion in the world, right? If you have spent time with people from other religions who are serious about their religion, you will notice how different it is.

[5 : 23] And what is the big difference? Well, it's grace, isn't it? The fact that it's not about what we do. It is about what Jesus has done.

And most religions, you know, Islam has the five pillars of Islam that you need to do to get to heaven. Or in Buddhism, there's the eightfold path. And I don't know the number for Hinduism, but, you know, there's things that you need to do.

And yet, as Christians, well, we believe it's all about what Jesus did, right? It's he lived a perfect life. And if we trust in him, we get that counted to us.

And everything we've done wrong, Jesus died for it. We don't have to make up for it with good things, right? And so there's no laws to give. There's no pray this many times a day, not do this, do that, no offerings.

And that's a wonderful thing. I mean, we see it here in this first half of this chapter, right? What is the, this is the Apostle Paul writing, and verse 9, this is what it's like to be a Christian.

[6 : 27] Verse 9, to be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own, that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God, that depends on faith.

I'm right with God. I'm accepted by him, purely by faith in Jesus, by what he has done, and not by my own efforts in keeping the law.

He's writing about people who, you know, Jewish people who said, no, no, you need to keep the law to be a Christian. And he says, well, I'm more Jewish than anyone. I'm more law keeping than anyone, but that's all rubbish.

No, we need Christ. Only he can make us right with God. But that's a wonderful thing. I mean, and once Jesus has done that, it's great. If you're a Christian, I hope you know that, right?

If you feel tempted, you know, to prove yourself, yeah, on Instagram, or at work, that you know, no, I'm already accepted fully by God. It's a wonderful thing.

[7 : 29] But then, how do people respond? When you say that, well, if I share this with religious people, that, you know, Jesus has done everything. You can go to heaven just by trusting him. They always say, but then, why should I be good?

Why should I make any effort to pray, to be holy, right? You're already accepted. You're already righteous. You already got in. What's the point, right? You know, why do that?

It's a good question. I mean, the New Testament asked that question, right? Famous chapter, Romans 6, shall we continue to sin? Because we are not under law, but under grace, right?

It is a very good question. Maybe that's something you wonder. You're here as a visitor, or you're not a Christian, and that seems so strange, right? That you're already fully accepted.

Why would you do anything? I mean, the logic makes a lot of sense. I mean, silly example. Back when I was at university, I studied electrical engineering, and there was a subject I had to do called electrical circuits.

[8 : 30] And anyway, there were four tests. Yeah. And I had to pass three out of four. So I passed the first three, and then what did I do?

Well, I stopped going to lectures, right? And then for the exam, I just went in, and I wrote my student number and the date, and then when the exam started, I handed in my paper and went out.

Why would I, right? I've already passed. That makes sense, right? I've got so much better things to do than this, right? Doing an exam, I've already passed. You can see the logic.

Well, why isn't, how about Christianity then, right? If Jesus has already done everything, what should we do? So, as we start a new year, I thought that's a great thing to preach on at the start of 2025.

And what does Paul say? Well, the thing is, we are not there yet. The thing I want to preach on is 3.12 to 4.1. And a few times he says, we are not there yet.

[9 : 34] Verse 12, not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

You can hear it. I press on because I'm not there yet, right? I haven't obtained it yet. I'm not perfect yet. And it seems so contradictory, right?

Aren't we perfect in Christ? Just when you trust in Jesus, you're perfect. Well, there's, the difference is between in status and in practice. Right?

In status and in practice. Christ has given us a status. And we are right with God. We belong to him. Verse 20 talks about our citizenship is in heaven.

Right? Citizenship talks about, you know, legal and rights and those kind of things, right? So, so legally, yeah, we belong to Christ. We, we're citizens of heaven. But Paul is thinking of practical reality.

[10 : 50] Right? He's thinking of knowing Christ and being like him. Of our thoughts and words and deeds. And the thing is, that hasn't changed yet.

Right? Paul says, I'm not yet perfect. I'm not there yet. Right? Having a legal status doesn't change your life. We still have a lowly body, not yet a glorious body.

We're not yet fully like Christ. I mean, a silly example, what makes a Hong Konger? You can talk about a legal status, right? And so, in that sense, I'm a Hong Konger.

I've been here eight and a half years. I'm a permanent resident of Hong Kong. I'm a real Hong Konger. Except, I don't really look like a Hong Konger, right? When it's 20 degrees, I still wear shorts and t-shirts.

I still don't know how to fill in the dim sum menu. You know, I want to buy lunch. I want to order, I want to say takeaway and they give me lemon tea.

- [11 : 47] If you can work that out. Those red envelopes, for years, I thought they were called light cheese. Right? Yeah, red, named after the fruit. That's what I thought until someone corrected me.
- I'm not a Hong Konger, right? In status, yes. In practice, no. But, it's the same thing with Christ. Paul says, that's me. I have Christ.
- I have the ID card. Yes. But, in practice, I'm still earthly. In practice, I'm not yet who I want to be. I'm still not like Christ.
- But, I want to be. And, and God wants us to be, right? God doesn't want us to just give us a new legal status and then for the rest we stay the same old, sinful people.
- No. God wants us to be transformed. He wants to make us all we can be. He wants to make us like Jesus. Isn't that the most wonderful thing? And, it's not just that, you know, God wants it.
- [12 : 46] Hopefully, we want it. Right? We don't want to be the people that we used to be. We, we want to be different. We want to be like Christ. We want to be more loving and more holy and more other-centered and more devoted.
- Right? We want to live for Christ like, anyway, like Paul does, but even more. Paul says, I want to do more. Right? But that's the thing. We should want it. Right? Hopefully, we want it.
- I mean, going back to electrical circuits, the problem is I just wasn't interested. Right? I wanted to do telecoms and this was just an obligatory, irrelevant subject to me, so I had no interest in it.
- If I really was passionate about electrical circuits, of course, I would go to the lectures and try to do well in the exam, even if I didn't need to because I was interested. So, the person who says, well, hey, if Jesus has done everything, I don't need to.
- That person doesn't want to be holy. They have no interest in knowing Jesus. They just, why should I? Well, they don't want to. But ideally, as Christians, yeah, the right thing is that we want to be different.
- [13 : 54] We want to know Christ more. We want to pursue Him. We want to love Him more. Right? We want to be like Him. And that is the Christian life.
- Verse 15, Paul says, let those of us who are mature think this way. Yeah, we're not there yet. That is being a mature Christian is having this mindset.
- Which is kind of weird, right? Because you think, if I'm mature, I've arrived. And Paul says, well, mature means being immature. Mature means knowing that you have not arrived yet.
- Yeah? But that is what Paul wants. So, I don't know, how do we see ourselves? I hope we rejoice in our salvation. I hope we rejoice that we have Christ and we have His righteousness.
- Right? We are fully accepted and yet, as Christians, I hope we want to, we want more. Right? We want to know Christ more. We want to change. We want to be more loving.
- [14 : 52] We want to be more patient. We want to please God more. We want to live a life that reflects Him more here in the world around us. Or do we want to stay the old sinner that we used to be?
- But then, what do we do? And Paul says, well, I press on. Right? Press on like Paul. Three times he says it, right? Verse 12, I press on to make it my own.
- Verse 13, I strain forward to what lies ahead. Verse 14, I press on towards the goal. I press on. I pursue. I mean, Paul, he used to pursue Christians to put them in prison, right?

And now he says, no, I'm pursuing Christ. I'm pursuing my goal. I run. I strain forward. The idea is this race where there's the finish line and he's running ahead to try and get the finish line.

That's what Paul was doing. Even though he's very careful, look, this is not me achieving my salvation, right? It is still grace, right? Verse 12, I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me His own.

[16:02] Jesus has already made me His own. Jesus has already done it. He's brought me to Himself, but now I want Him. I want to pursue Him. He's pursued me, but now I pursue Him.

And that's, yeah, so we are saved by grace, but Paul wants it. What does Paul mean? Yeah, just knowing Christ, being like Him, right? Seeking to grow through reading and praying and becoming more loving and holy and, you know, looking for ways to love people, looking for ways to spread the gospel, looking for ways to, you know, do all the stuff that, if you've read Philippians, you see Paul do, right?

If you've read the first two chapters, so many things about gospel centrality and about putting others first, all that kind of stuff. Now, we read that and maybe you think, well, Paul is this crazy maniac, right?

I mean, this is Paul. Paul is, he's a bit nuts. He's a super Christian and I'm just ordinary. But actually, Paul says that this is for all of us, right?

Verse 17, brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us, right? Follow my example.

[17:18] Follow those who are like me, people like Timothy and Epaphroditus who we read about in the, if you've read chapter two, right? Now, that shows that Paul doesn't mean do exactly what I did.

I mean, think about Paul, right? He planted over 20 churches. He wrote half the New Testament and he says, okay, imitate me. It doesn't mean that we should do exactly the same thing as he did, right?

We can't. No, he's thinking about a mindset, a mindset that we want to grow, a mindset that we want to press on.

I mean, standards don't really work. I mean, standards are a problem, right? Because either we think we've met them or we think we can't meet them, right? Maybe if the standard was, okay, read the Bible every day and pray two times a day and then you've done enough.

I mean, when you've done that then you just think, hey, that's fine, I can relax now, I've done everything. That's not right. That doesn't help. Or you think, I could never do that and you despair.

[18:25] No, Paul doesn't think like that. I mean, clearly it's not about a standard, right? Otherwise, Paul would have met it, right? Surely if it was about a standard, Paul could have said, I've done enough, right?

I mean, he met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He's an official apostle. He planted over 20 churches. He's now in prison and he says, hey, every single prison guard has heard the gospel from me.

Surely if anyone has done enough, it's Paul. But he says, I'm not there yet. I press on. So, of course, the real standard is Jesus. If you're like Jesus, then you can relax, right?

If you're perfect, but we're not. No, it's just a mindset. A mindset that, hey, we want to grow. We want to press on. No matter where you're at.

And I think it's so helpful that he just says, one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind. Verse 13. I just, I forget what lies behind. I strain forward.

[19 : 25] I just, I want to press on now. Because we find it so easy to look forward, to look back. But Paul says, hey, don't worry about the past.

Don't think about the past. Maybe some of us, oh, back when I was a student, then I did a lot of evangelism. And so now I can relax. Maybe, you know, before I had kids, I was a CG leader and I was on the music team.

And so I've done my bit and now I can relax. But that's not Paul's thinking. Paul says, I press on. So don't think about what you did in the past. Are you pressing on today?

Right? Today, are we, are you trying to grow? Are you trying to become more loving? Are you pressing on and knowing Jesus? Or we look back in despair.

Maybe it's the start of the year and you've looked back at 2024 and you feel like such a failure. I'm so useless, right? I've struggled to pray. I've struggled to read.

[20 : 25] Every quarter, I start a Bible reading plan and I give up and I'm just useless, you know? Paul says, forget what lies behind. Don't worry about that.

Can you pray today? Can you press on today? Can you read something today? Right? It's a mindset. How can we press on today? Because God knows all of us are different.

Some people, they're young and single and fit and maybe you, you have a big family and a very demanding job and, you know, that's different. And one person is a very young Christian and someone else has been a Christian for decades, right?

Pressing on looks different for each one of us. Don't compare yourself with others. Don't, you know, maybe you're a young Christian and this year you want to read one of those big Old Testament books.

that's a great thing for you to do. Someone else, maybe you've read the Bible cover to cover 15 times. I mean, for you there would be nothing. Is there something else you can do?

[21 : 28] How can we press on? And for each of us there will be things we can do. Maybe there are sins we can fight. And we can pray. We can read something.

We can find ways to serve Christ. We have gospel decisions that we can make. Right? But is that our desire? Are we seeking to grow?

Hey, we're in Christ. We have His righteousness but we want to be more like Him. So, this year, 2025, right? Let's say I'm not there yet.

I want more of Christ. I want more holiness, more love. What can I do? How can I keep running? How can I keep straining? forward. And that matters.

It matters, I mean, partly for ourselves, partly for the world, right? We want to shine like stars. We want people to see Jesus in our lives. Of course, we want our lives to more and more radiate His beauty and glory.

[22 : 30] Although Paul also says, he goes on in the same passage, by the way, that pressing on is also safe. And why? Well, Paul wants to warn us. I mean, he does a lot of warning.

I mean, he warned them about Judaizers who tell you to keep the law. You don't need that. But he also says, watch out for fakes. Watch out for fakes. Verse 17, brothers, brothers, join in imitating me.

Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Keep focused on people like me and people like me, but watch out for those people, right? I'm telling you, I'm warning you, don't follow them. Now, what kind of people?

It doesn't give much detail, but we can work out a few things, right? I mean, certainly, he's saying, watch out for these people who say, they say they are Christians. Christians. I mean, I think the Philippians know that there's a difference between those who follow Jesus and those who don't, right?

- [23 : 38] They see persecution, they've been converted. They don't have to watch out for that they're in danger of following those who don't know Jesus. So, there will be people who say they're Christians, but verse 19, their end is destruction, right?

These people are not with Jesus. They're not going to heaven. So, they seem to be fake. But why not? Well, the problem is their life, right?

They walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Walking is the Bible word for our daily life, our normal day-to-day behavior. And that behavior, he says, it's enemies of the cross, right?

They are denying the cross by their lives. And why? I think they're saying that sin doesn't matter. Right? Verse 19, their end is destruction. Their God is their belly and they glory in their shame.

Who is ruling their life is their belly, their stomach, their physical desires. That is their God. That is the one ruling their life. They glory in their shame.

- [24 : 47] They do shameful things and they're proud of it. They glory in it. I think their mind is set on earthly things. Their focus is just this world, right? Rather than our citizenship is in heaven.

So it seems these are people, yeah, they're living this indulgent, sinful lifestyle and they think it's fine. They think it's normal. And that is wrong.

And I think that that makes sense, right? Because that is how we started. If Jesus has done everything, then I don't need to do anything. I can just live however I want.

Well, it's the opposite of pressing on. No, Paul says that that's not right. If people like that, they're fake. It's very tempting though. That's why he warns them, right?

Maybe you find it hard to be a Christian and you're in your office and here's this other person and they say they're a Christian but they, you know, they're completely dishonest in all their business dealings.

- [25 : 43] They just live for pleasure and you're having a hard time and you think in a way it would be nice to be like this person. But Paul says no, no, no, that's a fake. That's someone denying the cross.

They're focused on earth. We are citizens of heaven. That's our focus, right? We pursue Christ unlike them. I don't know if that's something that's tempting for you but that is Paul's warning.

You know, press on because you want to be safe. Now, I know I get two responses when I say that. Some of you will say, hey, but aren't we saved by grace? Surely we're not saved by what we do and so they are not condemned by what they do.

How can you say it's fake? Well, the thing is, yes, we're saved by grace. We're saved by what Jesus has done but Jesus doesn't just give us a status, right? Jesus comes into our life. Grace changes us.

It gives us new desires. He gives us the Holy Spirit who wants to make us holy and so Christians want to be holy and a Christian who has no desire for holiness, well, is there a Holy Spirit in them?

- [26 : 53] That's the question the Bible would ask, right? Are they, yeah, is there really grace at work if there's no change in desires? And the other response that people say is people are worried.

Hey, my life isn't great. You know, I look at my life and it's so rubbish. I'm really not pressing on. Am I a fake? Right? I know that sounds very tricky especially because Paul does seem to distinguish between some people, right?

In verse 15, he says, let those of us who are mature think this way and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. So there are some people who are not pressing on and Paul says, hey, God will sort you out.

He's not worried. Well, there's other people, yeah, in verse 18 where he's really telling with tears don't be like them. I think it's good to remember it's not about a standard, right?

It's about a mindset, about a direction. It's not about have you reached this standard? No, what is the direction of your heart? Right? Do you want to know Christ more even if you don't know him very well now?

[28 : 04] Do you want to know him more? Do you want to be more holy even if you're not very holy now? Do you want to press on? If you don't want to, if you're happy as you are, if you don't want to change anything, then it's a problem.

But if you want to, even if there's not much pressing on yet, I think Paul isn't worried about you. Just keep pressing on. That's the thing, right?

It's just staying safe. Keep pressing on. That's the best way to know, you know, just press on. It's like with exercise. How much exercise is enough, right?

We want to be fit. We want to make sure our heart is okay and those kind of things. We want to do some exercise. Maybe you don't know if it's enough or not. The best way is just keep doing exercise, right? Don't think, well, I'm going to stop just in case I've done enough.

No, let's keep going. And so Paul says, just press on. It's good. It's great. It keeps you safe. But ultimately, staying safe is not the main thing, right?

[29 : 06] Look, who do you want to be? That is what this passage is asking, right? Do you want to be someone and your God is your belly? Do you want your stomach to be your God?

That's who controls my life. Or do you want Jesus to be your God, right? Do you want him at the center of your life? That's much more beautiful, right? That is his beautiful love and glorious holiness, right?

You want him to be in your life, right? Surely you want to be like Paul rather than like one of these people indulging themselves. And that is who you will be, right?

Jesus is committed to you. Jesus says, Paul says, our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Jesus is going to make the whole universe his and he's going to make you fully his one day when he comes back and your lowly body will be changed to his glorious, to be like his glorious body.

[30 : 17] But that power is here now today, right? Jesus, he would love you to be more holy, right? If you want to know him more, he is there to help you.

But if you want to beat that sin, he is there to help you. You can know more of Christ now with the power. He is more powerful than your sin. He is more powerful than your cold heart.

He can do everything. So, let's press on. In this new year, by the Spirit's power, let's press on. Let's pursue Christ. Let's try and become more like him.

Maybe, no, let's talk about it later, over coffee, over lunch. Hey, what are things that we can do? How can you know me? You're with your CG members.

What do you think I should do this year? How can I press on? What are things that are not helpful that I should stop doing? How can we help each other press on? Don't keep going.

[31 : 16] And even if the past few days were rubbish, let's press on today. Let's make this a wonderful year. Let's make 2025 the year where we keep pressing on, where we keep pursuing.

Christ for his glory and for the good of the whole world. Why don't we pray together? Lord Jesus, thank you for making us your own.

We didn't deserve it, but you came down and you will one day make us like you. Father, we want to press on this year. Help us to follow Jesus.

Help us to see what we can do. But yeah, help us see how wonderful it is to know you more, to know Jesus, to become like him. Help us press on. Help us to watch out for those who would lead us astray.

Help us to keep running the race. And would you be with us? By your spirit, would you keep changing us, make us more and more like Jesus, which is a wonderful thing.

[32 : 23] We need your help with that. We can't do it by ourselves. But thanks to you and your spirit and your grace, we can keep running the race this coming year. And so we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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