

New Beginnings

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[0 : 0 0] Today's scripture passage is found in Philippians chapter 3 verses 1 to 16. Please follow along in your bulletin. 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 the flesh.

For we are the circumcision, who 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, the Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee.

As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

[1 : 0 2] 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, becoming 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 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 towards the goal, for the price of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let those of you who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

This is the reading of God's word. Good morning. I'm Eric. If you don't know me, I'm the youth guy here at Watermark Church.

[2 : 2 3] It's great to see you all this morning. Everyone still awake and alive after Christmas, and after the end of the world. Yes. So, I usually on Thursdays after work, go over and do some after-school tutoring for some inner-city kids.

And a few weeks ago, I was there, I was tutoring this kid that I tutor every week, and he was doing math homework, and he had this word problem. And it said, a watermelon costs \$6 per kilogram.

The cost of a honeydew melon is one in three-fifths the times that of a watermelon. Daddy buys a honeydew melon that weighs two and a half kg. How much does he pay? So, the kid...

Too much. Probably, yes. So, the kid sits there. He thinks really, really hard about it. Doesn't write anything down on the paper. Keeps thinking.

Turns to me, and he says, very seriously, maybe it will be free. And I looked at the kid, and I was like, why on earth would this honeydew melon be free? You just have all the problem right here.

[3 : 30] Why would it be free after you've read all this? And he says, well, maybe daddy knows the shopkeeper. And I said, no, you're not allowed to write that down.

But it made me think. You know, in Hong Kong, we are a city that loves our steps. We love our processes. We have a destination, a goal that we want to get to, and we have step A, B, C, D, E, however many we need, to get to that goal.

We build a process so we can achieve the ends that we desire. You know, this time of year, that's especially obvious, because we have New Year's resolutions coming up. Everyone wants to lose weight, quit smoking, go to church more, save more money.

And everyone has this process and this plan that they have come up with to figure out, here's how we're going to solve this. Here's how we're going to fix this problem in our lives.

And while I was doing research this week, I actually found out, interestingly, that 88% of all New Year's resolutions fail, according to a study done in 2007 of over 3,000 people.

[4 : 33] Over 88% of New Year's resolutions fail. As I thought about this kid and how he approached his math problem and us and how we approach life, I had a realization that this kid, rather than turning to the systems that he was supposed to use to solve the problem, solved the problem through a relationship.

Instead of writing down, oh, \$6 per kg times 1 and 3 fifths times that, times 2 kg, he just said, oh, daddy knows the shopkeeper, it's going to be free.

He simplified the entire process and got a better result. And as I thought about us in the church, I realized that a lot of times we approach our spiritual life by trying to improve and trying to fix ourselves through systems.

We say, I'm going to read my Bible more, I'm going to go to church more, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that. And we have this list of systems that we think will fix us, will make us better. But if you look at the Bible, the call is not for us to pursue systems, it's to pursue a relationship.

And it says that by pursuing this relationship, we'll not only simplify the process, but we'll also achieve better results. So as we look at today's passage in Philippians chapter 3, we have this guy named the Apostle Paul.

[6 : 00] Now Paul was the king of fixing himself through resolutions, through systems. He had it all. And he lists off what he has accomplished in this passage.

He starts off saying, you know, if anyone thinks that they've done enough good stuff that they can be saved, I am the guy. His first item on the list, he was circumcised on the eighth day.

This is a Jewish, part of the Jewish law that baby boys were supposed to be circumcised on the eighth day. And he was, which means that he came from a good family where his parents kept the law for him before he was even old enough to know what was going on.

Next up, he's of the people of Israel. He's part of God's chosen people. And he's not just any Israelite. He's from the tribe of Benjamin, which back in the day, Israel had this big split.

And 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel left following the king after David's line, the line that God had established. And Benjamin was one of the two tribes that actually stayed and followed that king.

[7 : 05] And so being part of this tribe was something that he could look at as an accomplishment and achievement. Even though he had no control over what family he was born into, it was still an achievement that he could point to and say, look, I'm better off because of this if we're grading bi-worldly standards.

He says he's a Hebrew of Hebrews. As to the law, a Pharisee. He was a religious leader. He wasn't just some random guy on the street. He had studied the Old Testament inside and out.

He knew what it said. He was a leader in the religious group. As to Zeal, a persecutor of the church, he believed so strongly in what he believed. He was so passionate about defending God's truth that he had revealed to his people that he was willing to go out and violently persecute the people that he thought were corrupting that truth.

As to righteousness under the law, blameless. There was nothing that he had done, nothing in his life that anyone could point to and say, hey, you messed up. He kept all the rules.

He had everything going on for him. He had it all. And then you look at the next verse, verse 7. He says, whatever gain I had, I've counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

[8 : 26] He has this list of accomplishments, all of the systems, all of the processes, and he says, ultimately, it's loss because I found something else, Christ, that's more valuable.

The picture he's painting for us here is a business transaction. He has two columns, the assets column and the liabilities column. And he says, formerly, in the assets column, there were all these things.

There was circumcised 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 zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless. And he took a big sharpie and crossed out the words assets from the top of that list and wrote liabilities.

He drew a new assets column and in that column he wrote one thing, Christ. Everything that he had counted on before, everything that he had leaned on for his salvation, for his hope, he counts it as loss, as liabilities, because ultimately, Christ is the greater thing that he has found.

The systems lose their value when he finds this hope in a relationship instead. He then goes on. He says, indeed, for his sake, I have counted everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

[9 : 42] There's another picture we have here. Imagine a man on a boat filled with gold. This man is sailing and he knows that when he reaches the shore, he will be very rich.

And a storm hits. He has two options. Either he can take all this gold on the boat, throw it overboard, and survive with his life, or he can hold on to this gold, hold on to this hope of wealth, and drown with his treasure.

And he sees that having life is of way more value than having even this great treasure, and so he throws this treasure overboard from his boat because he knows that life is more precious than this.

Paul here, he looks at all of his accomplishments, he looks at everything he's accomplished. He says, yeah, these aren't bad things. It's not bad to have been a religious leader. It's not bad to be an Israelite. These are good things.

But ultimately, if I hold on to them instead of holding on to Christ, it's going to lead to death. And so I'm going to take them and throw them overboard. Get rid of them because the treasure that I'm reaching towards is of so much more worth and so much more value than even these good things that I have now.

[11 : 03] And when he talks about how he's, he's, you know, counted these things as loss, it's not just that he's sort of passively letting them go, but he's actively pursuing this because of the worth that he has found instead.

He says he counts these things as rubbish. It's not like he gets rid of these things and then keeps looking back and thinks, oh, look at all that I had to give up in order to follow Jesus.

No, he says it's rubbish. It's, that word can be translated as crap. This garbage that I've given up. All these good things in comparison to what I've found, they're garbage.

I don't care about them. I don't think about them. I don't dwell over what I've lost or given up because I have found something of so much greater value. I am pursuing this instead.

And he repeatedly, repeatedly mentions the treasure that he has found in this passage. He says, I've given up all these things.

[12 : 02] In verse 7, he says, whatever gain I had, I've counted loss. Why? For the sake of Christ. In verse 8, indeed, I count everything as loss. Why? Because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

And then he says, for his sake, I've suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish. Why? In order that I may gain Christ. This is what it's constantly coming back to for Paul. All of these systems, everything that he had achieved on his own, he says, it's worthless because there's a greater treasure that I have found.

He goes on, he says he wants to be found in him, found in Christ, not having a righteousness of his own that comes through the law, but that which comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

He goes on in the next verse and says that he wants to know Christ. That's what he's reaching for. That's what he's working towards, to know Christ. To know the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, to become like him in his death, so that by any means possible, he may attain the resurrection of the dead.

And then he goes on even further and he says that in verse 14 that he's forgetting everything that lies behind, everything he has given up. He's not worrying about that.

[13 : 19] He's not daydreaming about what he could have had. He's forgetting it and he is straining forward, he is fighting, he is pressing on for this prize, for a treasure, for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul sees this value of knowing Christ and says that in comparison to this, all of his systems, all of his resolutions, all of his achievements are worthless.

And so we can talk about knowing Christ, but it's sort of an abstract idea, right? Like, what does it mean to know Christ? And there's a pastor, he has a very good quote about knowing Christ.

His name is J.I. Packer and he says, one does not know a living thing till one knows not merely its past history, but how it's likely to react and behave under specific circumstances.

One does not know a living thing till one knows not merely its past history, but how it is likely to react and behave under specific circumstances. So knowing about God is not necessarily the same as knowing God.

[14 : 34] Knowing God is not just about knowing a list of statistics and facts, but about knowing a living being, about having a relationship with him that we can see and know through experience how he will respond in different situations in our lives.

My brother last year, he's a business student, he had to do a project on Hong Kong for school. He read articles, he did research, he called me up and asked me lots of questions about Hong Kong, and he did his project and this past Friday night I was talking to him and during our conversation he made a comment, oh yeah, I'm an expert on Hong Kong.

He's never been to Hong Kong, never even been to Asia, and I just laughed at him. I said, you don't know the first thing about Hong Kong. Yeah, you can name off all these statistics, that's great, but if we dropped you in Wan Chai and said, hey, be in Central for a lunch meeting in an hour, he would have no idea what to do, how to get there, where to go.

You know, there's a certain vocabulary in Hong Kong that's very different than back in the States. If someone starts talking to him about their flat, he'd be like, huh, what are you talking about? If someone tells him to travel somewhere and take the subway, he'd be looking for the MTR, not a tunnel under the ground.

If someone mentions a duvet, he'd be like, what on earth is that? Because he doesn't know Hong Kong, he hasn't been here, he hasn't experienced it, he knows a lot about Hong Kong, he's read the statistics, read the facts, knows the articles, but he's never been here.

[16:05] He doesn't know what this city is about. He doesn't know how people will respond here when he says certain things. Like, if he had to go use the bathroom and he walks up to a local waiter and he says, where's the restroom?

He'll probably get a funny face and he wouldn't know that because you have to ask, where's the toilet instead? And then they'll respond. And these are things that you learn about the city through time and experience in the city.

And in a similar way, you don't get to know God just by knowing facts about him, but by spending time and gaining experience with him. In university, I had a roommate who got to know me pretty well.

We were roommates first semester and then suite mates second semester, so we had a lot of time around each other. For those of you who don't know me, I'm a pretty laid back guy and that really bothered my roommate.

He wanted to see me angry. And so he began testing various ways of making me angry. He would make fun of me, he would tease me, that didn't bother me.

[17:05] He would do various things, whatever, no big deal. But finally, one day, he found the one thing that he could do that would make me consistently respond with anger to him.

Biting me. We'd be standing next to each other and he'd just turn and be like... And I mean, he would bite hard, he would leave teeth marks.

And I would get angry every single time. Understandably, right? Yes? But he knew through the time that we had spent together and through the experiences that we had shared together that if he wanted to see me angry, which apparently he did from time to time, biting me was the way to do that.

And so he got to know me, he tested what will work, what will not work to make Eric angry. And biting me was what he found out worked. So one day, he had bit me and I was just like, why are you biting me?

He was like, because you never get angry unless I bite you. I didn't get it. But apparently for him, that was how he had learned to anticipate my response.

[18:14] By testing out various means, see how I responded, and then finding the way that I would respond in anger, righteous anger. And just as with these relationships with God, it's not just about learning statistics, it's not just about learning facts, but it's about pursuing a relationship, spending time together, time to get to know him, about building experiences, about consistently seeing, hey, when I need God, how is he responding to me?

How is he working in my life? How is he there for me? How is he shaping me to be more like him? And so how do we get to know God?

I'm a little bit hesitant right here because I'm up here talking about how it's about a relationship and not steps, and I'm about to give you steps. So I'm going to give you a disclaimer before I give you the steps. That each of these steps is not an end in and of itself.

Each of these steps is intended to be a means to the end of having a deeper, fuller relationship with Christ where we know him more. What I mean by that is that if you start reading your Bible for 15 minutes every day, that does not automatically in and of itself make you a better Christian if it doesn't help you to know Jesus.

If you start coming to church more often, but it's more about having an item to check off your list instead of pursuing a relationship with God and with other Christians within the church is the wrong motives.

[19 : 46] And yes, sometimes spiritual disciplines and resolutions are good and even necessary, but they can also be pursued for the wrong reasons. So as I give you this list, it is not a list so that we can check things off and say, all right, I read my Bible today, I prayed today, I'm at church, yes, but it's a list of ways to help pursue a relationship with God to help get to know him better.

So the first item is reading our Bibles. It's how God has spoken to us. In Hebrews chapter 1, it says that long ago in many times, many, you know, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets.

That God has spoken, that the words that he has spoken are recorded for us here so that we can see them and we can read them. 2 Timothy 3.16 talks about how all scripture, the Bible, is God-breathed and is given to us to help us grow.

That in the Bible, we have the words of God given to us so that we can know him. So that we can pursue this treasure that Paul was pursuing, that Paul said was so valuable that he wanted it even if it cost him his life.

3 Timothy 3.16 The second thing that we can do is pray. You know, prayer, in prayer, we can express desires to God, we can give thanks to God, we can confess our sins to God, we can talk to God about how great he is.

[21 : 22] I think one of the most helpful definitions of prayer that I've ever heard is a pastor who said, prayer is living with a constant awareness of God's presence in our everyday lives.

that sometimes prayer isn't just getting down on our knees and being like, dear God, please help me with this. But it's as we go to work, as we're riding in the MTR, being aware of the fact that God is with us, that what we do is a reflection of who he is, that when we need him, he is there for us, and that will help us to develop an awareness of his presence with us and activity in our lives on a day-to-day, moment-by-moment basis.

Next up, time in gospel community. Other Christians are one of the greatest tools that God has given us to help us become more like him.

In gospel community, we are able to see aspects of God's love for us reflected to us in other Christians. When we fail and mess up, we get forgiveness that we don't deserve.

We get unconditional love. We have friends who are willing to call us out and tell us when there's something wrong with us instead of ignoring the problem and pretending like it doesn't exist.

[22 : 44] And there are times where community can go very, very, very wrong. But when it is done properly, it is one of the greatest tools that God uses to make us more like him and to help us know him.

Here at Watermark, we like to encourage people to get involved in community groups. If you're not in one, we would encourage you to sign up for one after service. There will be a sign-up table right out back. But this time in gospel community, time around other Christians, where we can speak the gospel to each other, where we can model the transformation that the gospel brings to our lives, is huge and hugely important in helping us get to know Christ.

And the fourth item on the list is another one that's sort of vague and ambiguous because its specific application for each person could be very different.

But it's living in obedience to God's word. This isn't something, again, this isn't something that in and of itself makes us better Christians. But it's something, it's not something that helps God love us more.

That's a gift given to us through what Jesus has done. But, when we obey God, when we obey His word, we are constantly put into situations where we need Him.

[24 : 00] Maybe, being obedient to God's word will cost us a relationship because the people that we're hanging out with don't want to hang out with someone who's going to actually obey God. And in those moments, we see that God is with us and will not forsake us even when everyone else does.

Maybe, being obedient to God's word means that we become more generous, that we give away more of what we have. And we have to learn to trust God to provide for us in our times of need.

Maybe it means that rather than finding our hope in a relationship or in a job or in grades, we find our hope in Him and we have to learn that He actually will sustain us, that He is big enough to place our hope in.

You know, each of these things, as we go towards them, I guess you could say it's like sharing in His sufferings like Paul talks about in this passage. It's a way of coming alongside and seeing what Jesus' life was like for us when He lived.

It helps us to understand what He went through and to develop this trust in God, this relationship with God within our lives. and there are other ways, many other ways that we can grow in our relationship with God, but ultimately, like I said, with any relationship, it comes down to time together and experience of one another.

[25 : 30] Time together with God either individually or in gospel community where we can get to know Him, get to know what His heart is, how He thinks, and be shaped by that and experience of seeing Him be faithful again and again, of seeing Him work powerfully in situations where we never understood how He could have worked.

And this shift from pursuing God through systems and resolutions to pursuing God through a relationship, it doesn't slow down our progress in becoming more like Him.

It speeds it up, actually, just like the kid at the start who had Daddy got the honeydew melon for free because of a relationship. When we pursue Christ through this relationship, it speeds up our process.

It improves the results. Because as long as we are focused on what we can do, on what we have to change about ourselves, about what's wrong with me, it's like we're slaves.

We have this oppressive master standing over us saying, do, do, do, more, more, more, work harder, do better. But when we look to Christ and find our hope in a relationship with Him, we hear His message that it is finished, that it is done, that everything that we need to achieve for God to love us has been achieved by Him.

[27 : 02] and that rather than pursuing this betterment through being slaves, we can pursue it in freedom because the victory has already been won. There's a pastor named Tulian Chavidyan.

He's Billy Graham's grandson. He has this excellent quote and he says, I've come to the realization that when I stop obsessing over my need to improve, that is improvement.

When I stop obsessing narcissistically over my need to get better, that is what the Bible means by getting better. Progress in the Christian life is not I'm getting better and better and better.

Progress in the Christian life is growing in my realization of just how bad I am and growing in my appreciation of just how much Jesus has done for me.

Progress is not okay, I've set my list, I've kept everything on the list, I'm better now than I was at this time last year. Progress is realizing that we are broken, that we are sinners, that we are desperately in need of a Savior and that Jesus is the exact Savior Savior that we need for our problem, that we are way worse than we ever could have imagined, that He loves us way more than we ever could have hoped for.

[28 : 29] That is what is meant by progress in our Christian faith, getting to know Him more. And so as we get ready to leave today, I want to leave you with a couple questions to consider, think about.

the first one is, what is the one passion in your life that makes everything else look like rubbish in comparison? What is the one thing that you say, if I can have this, everything else doesn't matter?

Is it knowing Christ? is it having lots and lots of money? Is it finding that special someone and getting that relationship of your dreams?

Is it good grades? And if it's not Christ, what would it take for Christ to become that great passion in your life?

What changes would need to be made in the way that you think, in the way that you spend your time, in the way that you use your money? And are we willing to make those changes?

[29 : 39] I know for me, a lot of times when I truly honestly look at my life and I look at what I'm pursuing, it's not Christ as the primary, the main thing.

That I look back and I see, you know, I'm dreaming about, oh, imagine if I had this other job and the things that I could buy if I had all this money from working at a bank.

And it's not, oh, Christ is my treasure, Christ is my joy, I'm content in him. But it's looking back, it's not counting everything else as rubbish, it's just sort of trying to find a balance.

But that's not what Christ calls us to do. there's a booklet on your seat today. We encourage each of you to take those home, to read through them, to fill them out.

Basically, these booklets are to help you think through what is my mission, what is my vision, what is my purpose as I enter this new year. We hope that, again, this isn't something that if you fill it out, it'll make you a better Christian.

[30 : 51] But we're hoping that it's a tool that will help you get to know Christ more in this upcoming year. and we'll know that we've reached this point where we can say Christ is truly our treasure, when we can say simply, honestly, not because we feel that as Christians we ought to, but because it is a plain matter of fact that we have known God.

And that because we have known Him, the unpleasantness we have had or the pleasantness we have not had, because we are Christians, does not matter to us because of how great God is in comparison.

When we can say that we have known God, not because we feel like we should as Christians, not because we think that's the right church answer, but because it's true, it's a fact, that we have known God, and that because we have known Him, any unpleasantness we have suffered through being Christians, or any pleasantness we have not gotten to enjoy because of following Him, is rubbish, it's worthless, meaningless, in comparison to the treasure that we have found in Him.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for this treasure, we thank You for the fact that You have given us Christ, that You have given us life, that You have given us hope, that You have allowed us to know You.

We pray that as we enter this new year, that we would make it our goal to know You, that You would be our treasure, and that everything else would be rubbish in comparison to us.

[32 : 36] God, give us a greater love for You. Help us to pursue knowing You with every ounce of effort that we can, with every piece of our being.

Let us know You more. Let us love You more. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Let's stand and enjoy our relationship with God in the practice that we heard this morning.

That I may know Christ more. Can you repeat that with me? That I may know Christ more. That I may know Christ more.

I don't know where you are on your journey today where God has you. But I think that's a question that each of us needs to ask this new year. What does it look like for that to happen?

What are some things maybe that I need to think about in my world for that to happen? We believe God has placed this church here to help people take that next step wherever they're at in their spiritual journey.

[33 : 44] That you would know Christ more. And fall in love with him more. It's about a relationship. It's not about religion. It's about a relationship.

You know one of the things we've been praying about a lot is someone asked me hey are we going to have a New Year's Eve service and we're like oh wow that would be like four services in eight days right? This craziness.

But you know we our hope is maybe I should put it this way. If you walk into our community center there's a sign in Chinese on the wall and it says the first person plants the seed and the next person benefits from the shade.

And we believe that no matter how long God has you here whether it's ten days I met somebody here for ten days on school break or it's two years it will turn into twenty years like some people that God wants you to plant a seed which is Jesus Christ in people's lives around you.

We're not going to have a New Year's Eve celebration here because we want you to be out in New Year's Eve celebrations with your friends planting the seed of Christ in their life and trusting the Lord to grow it up.

[35 : 00] They would come to know him. Does that make sense? So we want you to be out there Christine and I are going to be out with some of our closest neighbors we've been trying to spend time with for two years now.

Some of the rugby crew. And our prayer is that every one of you would be out there with some of your friends sharing with them getting to know them placing that seed of Jesus that relationship in their world.

So we are so excited that you are here with us on this journey for this next year. Again as Eric shared take this home think about it think about it in the context of that I may know Christ more.

How can I do that this year? Let me pray for us. Father we just thank you for this day. We thank you that we come before you as your people and we know that you're always with us.

And still yet we struggle sometimes as we think about that and wondering if there are things in our world that we cling to instead of you. So I pray for my heart.

[36 : 05] I pray for all of our hearts here. That you would make it clear what that is in our world today. That you would give us the strength to confess that to you.

Because identifying it and confessing it is the big step. Lord we pray that we would fall more in love with your son as we live these things behind that Paul said was scubala.

Rubbish. Lord may we be a people that knows you more. That falls in love with you more. And as those 95% of Hong Kong around us who walk in darkness they have no relationship with you.

Lord we pray that the 95% would see you in us. They would ask questions. The seed would be planted and you would grow it up and eternity would be different.

So Lord we come to you this beginning of this next year and we lay it all at your feet. Help us to know you more in a relationship through your son Jesus.

[37 : 22] We love you. We pray all these things in your son Jesus' holy name. Amen. We'll see you back here next week. Please don't run away. There's food and drinks out there. We'd love to meet you.

We'd love to meet you. We'd love to meet you.