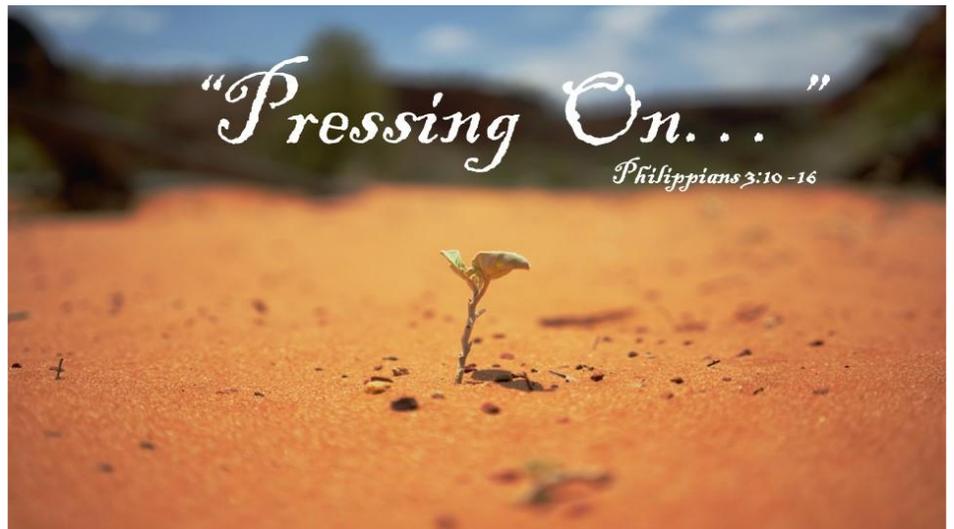


“Pressing On...”

Philippians 3:10-16

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Philippians 3:10 – 16

... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing [I do], forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to [the degree] that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

3:10-11

The NLT renders verses 10 & 11 as “I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!” Note the words “I want to **know** Christ.” The word ‘know’ here is the word ‘gnosko.’ This speaks of a ‘personal knowledge’ that comes through my interacting...my ‘experiencing’ Christ in a tangible way. This is not intellectual knowledge or discerning knowledge but rather a ‘hands on’ knowledge.

Genesis 4, verse 1 uses the same language concerning the relationship between Adam and his wife. It says Adam “knew” Eve. Such speaks of a superior level of intimacy and personal connection between two individuals, expressed even on a physical level. How does this take place? Well, for starters, we are the ‘body of Christ.’ We too are physical creatures thus we cannot therefore experience Christ unless we experience and embrace that ‘body life.’ You cannot ‘gnosko’ him without participating physically with his living earthly body.

We also are told that we cannot fully know Him if we fail to “keep His commandments.” I’m not talking about some level of perfection, but rather those who outright reject some of His scriptural instructions and still say they want to know Him! That can never be! We read how Paul was passionate to know Christ. Many of us would claim the same. But for what reason? Paul has already stated how this treasure of redemption is provided to us, but what is our part? Do we even have one? Paul certainly thought so.

Our reasoning, in our current religious climate, is that since we can do nothing to receive this treasure... because it is all the gift of God’s free grace and we simply have it by faith in Christ alone...we therefore play no personal part in this exchange. Of course such thinking naturally leads us to a spiritual lifestyle that is innately

lazy and passive. But that's not what Paul wants! For Him, such a "knowing" of God actually leads him into a life of passionately pursuing the prize.

What does our passage say? "I want to **know** Christ and **experience** the mighty power that raised him from the dead...." He even goes on to say that one way or another he would also, *like Christ*, experience the resurrection from the dead. Paul isn't trying to earn all of this, for it is clear he understands that it has been freely given to Him by Christ! Then why the passion? Why the investment? Why press on?

Clearly it is because He is driven by a desire to "gnosko know"...to experience His redeemer so intimately that he sought to walk in Christ's shoes...to embrace all that Jesus experienced! He wanted to actually *live* in the "power of Christ's resurrection." He clearly felt that he had been "reborn" that day out on the Damascus road and now he wanted to squeeze the very marrow out of that resurrected life. That life was not and *is not* one of comfort and feel-good emotions. It is very different than the pre-resurrected life. The latter one pursues holiness, advances the kingdom, serves others, exercises the gifts of the present Holy Spirit within Christian community and finds reason to worship the Creator every day!

Many will claim to desire a "closer walk with Christ" but at the same time will overtly reject the life that Jesus lived! They want Jesus to join them in *their* life, not for them to join Him in *His*! Why can't I be closer to Christ while staying home and pursuing my earthly and fleshly desires? Because that's not where Christ is! Oh yes, God is omnipresent, but his great power was never greatly manifested in such places and in such activities. Read it in the gospels!

Christ's power was lived out in interaction with people...service unto them, loving them and in fellowship with them. His power was never for selfish feelings and pursuits. We speak so often about a "personal relationship" with Christ, but we must walk very carefully here! For no relationship with Christ is ever lived out in a vacuum. We were never called to spend all of our time in our "prayer closet." Are we going where Jesus is going? Or are we still looking for Him to be our 'personal buddy' at the expense of others? Are we just attempting to keep Jesus in our back pocket? Or are we unleashing him on our world and joining Him in His pursuits? Paul was always active and moving, because Jesus was and is always active and moving!

If your objective was to "know" me in such a personal way, how would that ever happen if you don't go where I go, do what I do, and actively experience my life with me? It is no different with Christ! Is it enough to just read about Him? Paul wanted to embrace...to experience...to actually live out the "resurrected life" and to be a very part of what Jesus was doing.

Let me ask you this: If you believe yourself to be seeking Christ and a relationship with Him, ...just where are you looking for Him? Where He is active and doing the miraculous, or rather where you *want Him to be*? Jesus...in His physical departure from this earth, said "*go unto all the world.*" That's where **He** spent His life! Do you think that has now changed? Such a unified life with Christ is both incredibly blessed and at the same time incredibly costly. Jesus saw miraculous healing, joy, and renewal, while at the same time experiencing great suffering. It clearly comes with the territory! Your salvation is a free gift but there is no free Christian living. If you want to know Jesus...really know Him, then you have to "get into the game and onto the field." Oh yes...you are going to get beat up some, but you are also going to get to see the victories...the miraculous...the manifest power of God!

Indeed there is a "fellowship of suffering" as verse 10 says. Let that word "fellowship" roll over you! For such demands contact with **Him**, as well as **His body**...that's the rest of us!

1 John 1:6-7 clearly tells us that “*we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.*” Let’s face it. There is no vertical relationship with God without a horizontal relationship with each other! All of this comes on the heels of men seeking God without cost, without inconvenience, without discomfort! But that is impossible. It will not happen! For Jesus does not dwell in such a state!

John 5: 39-40 “*You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.*” We still so often fail to understand the most basic and crucial aspects of Christianity! Unless we come to Him and share in His death, we cannot share in His life! For that *is* essentially the salvation experience! This is why many of us who believe ourselves to be saved are in truth not really reborn. We never died, so thus there was and is no new life to experience! So many of us are still holding onto our lives and moreover looking for Him to ‘heal it’...to “rehab” it. To make it well; to make it full and rich and substantial. But Jesus is not in this business. He is in the business of *new* life. And for that we must die to this one.

Verse 10 speaks of “being conformed” to His death. (Wuerst) “being conformed” means literally, “to bring to the same form with some other person.” The Greek word means “to give outward expression of one’s inner intrinsic nature.” Paul’s desire was that he might so come to know his Lord, the power of His resurrection operative in his life, and a joint-participation in His sufferings, so that he would be brought to the place where he would become, both as to his inner heart life and also as to the outward expression of the same, like his Lord.

For Paul it was that lifestyle that conditioned His entire earthly life and made it the beautiful life it was, a death and denying of self for the blessing of others. This was what Paul was striving for. It speaks of the most radical of conformity. Hudson Taylor said: “*There is a needs-be for us to give ourselves for the life of the world...*” *Fruit-bearing involves cross-bearing. “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and dies, it abides alone.” We know how the Lord Jesus became fruitful—not by carrying His cross only, but by dying on it. Do we know much of fellowship with Him in this? There are not two Christs—an easy-going Christ for easy-going Christians, and a suffering, toiling Christ for exceptional believers. There is only one Christ. Are we willing to abide in Him and so to bear fruit?”*

Verse 11 says “*...if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*” What is he saying? Is he still, after 25 years of being a Christian still unsure of his position and standing with Christ? Is he still unsure that he will live eternally with Christ? Or is he...*and the context of this verse in all that he has said and will say following this verse supports this under-standing*, saying rather that his desire is to leave a life of death behind him and experience the grand awakening of new life...in this life, that Jesus has shared with us through His own resurrection after death upon the cross?

Resurrection (1815...exanastasis from ek = out of or from + anistemi = to rise up) refers to the state or condition of coming up from among the dead. Literally it is the "out resurrection" a graphic word used only here in the NT. And then Paul adds ‘ek nekron’ literally "out from the dead"! So literally Paul is saying "I want to attain the out resurrection from among the dead." “I want to live the ‘new resurrected life’ that Jesus lived... DO YOU?”

3:12-14

Paul is not claiming that he had “arrived.” That he had reached some level of spiritual completion. He was not there yet. But note the language Paul uses concerning this goal: ***He was “pressing on.”*** Seeking still to “lay

hold” of this position and presence of Christ in his life, knowing that Christ was already so present in his heart by grace and mercy...not because of his efforts.

He says again in verse 14... “I press on.” That can’t happen without personal impassioned effort! Gang...you will always struggle with sin as long as you are in this life. And indeed, God doesn’t kick you out of the club because you fall down! The question is not ‘do you fail’...but rather are you even in the game? Are you driven onward into a practical sanctification out of a deep passion for Christ and kingdom?

God will always take you back when you fail...always forgive, always hold you tight if you have the heart and passion that manifests itself by “pressing on.” We know in this passage, that Paul is not asking for you to never “look back over your shoulder” historically speaking. No, God often asks His people to remember. He had them build memorials so they wouldn’t forget where they came from and what they went through getting there. So Paul is not negating our testimony or our past.

What Paul is looking to do is to remove any of the plethora of excuses that we cling to in order to stand down from running the race. Perhaps it is a dark sin from your past. Maybe that past was yesterday! It is the devils work that says you are declared “out.” That you are unworthy...because we all are unworthy! But there is nothing you can ever do to exclude you from the cross. That act was done for you before you committed sin one! It was done for your life before you ever started to trash it.

Unless you possibly have some bodies hidden someplace, I doubt if you could match sin with Paul. But it doesn’t matter if you do, because Jesus has it covered. Just set it down and press on! I promise you that Christ...and we here in this fellowship, will press on with you.

So let me ask you today: are you still moving forward? Are you indeed pressing on? M.R. DeHann says, “Progress is the healthy condition of every Christian man; and he only realizes his best estate while he is growing in grace, "adding to his faith virtue," "following on to know the Lord," and daily receiving grace upon grace out of the fullness which is treasured up in Christ Jesus.”

“Press on” means to move quickly and energetically toward some objective. It thus literally pictures vigorous activity. Paul therefore emphasizes the necessity for each of us to vigorously, uncompromisingly, continually as the habit of our life, to “work out our salvation in fear and trembling.” Paul continually exerts effort to forge ahead. He has in mind the image of a Greek runner streaking down the race course. He is keeping up the chase. He is pressing on toward a fixed goal. Paul pursued sanctification with all his might, straining every spiritual muscle to win the prize. In the spiritual life, direction makes all the difference. True believers aren’t in heaven yet, but they continually aim their steps in that direction.

3:15

The world...and even much of the broader church today, will intimate if not advocate the idea that our great goal in life is happiness. But not according to God! According to Him, the great goal is not happiness but holiness. So many of us are blown about through life on a quest for the holy grail of happiness. But the Bible speaks of faith in terms of joy, not the fleeting emotional state of ‘happy.’ Happy comes from pleasing me, while joy comes to me as a reborn child of God, in pleasing Him! Happy is an emotion, while joy is a state of being. Being like Him I am complete. That alone brings a deep-seated joy. If it doesn’t, that means we haven’t been redeemed and have yet to take upon us the nature of Christ.

Did living the way He did bring Christ joy? If so, then if we are born again and becoming daily more like Him, wouldn't living like Him bring us joy also? When we are religious but not true born again, we will only allow God his 'allotted' space. When we find that walking in faith and serving Him does not daily make us 'happy' we then 'one-up' God by going to a "professional" in the world to resolve our issues. It's not that God will not or does not answer us, it is just that we don't like His answer, so we look to the world for another one. Like a child who doesn't like the answer Dad gave him, he runs to mom and asks the question again in hopes of a different outcome!

Paul has been dealing with this idea throughout this chapter. The issue of "stepping up" and living...in this life, the resurrected life. Paul goes on to say that those that are mature will manifest certain behaviors and lifestyle, all based upon a willingness to bend every effort in the quest for likeness to the Lord Jesus. This is the mature view of the Christian faith.

Some will say its extreme, radical, or even fanatical. But the apostle Paul states that those who are full-grown will see that this is the only sane, logical, reasonable response to the One who shed His life-blood for them on the cross. *If in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal this to you;* Paul knows that there will be many, both then and now, who will certainly not agree with him in adopting such a "dangerous" philosophy. But he states clearly that if a person is really desiring to know the truth of the matter, God will show it to him. I have no doubt that He is already trying to do so!

The reason we have such an easy-going, complacent and unfulfilling Christianity today is because we do not really want to know the truth as He gives it, therefore we are not willing to obey the demands of real and faithful Christianity. God is willing to show the truth to those who are willing to follow it! Those that are "mature" quite simply are those that are no longer "babies." Those that have come to a state of life where they deal with Christ as an adult, no longer the tantrumy toddlers whose world revolves around themselves and their desires.

1 Cor 2:6—...when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten.

Heb 5:14— Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.

3:16

Some folks are just constantly looking for some new thing, while ignoring what they already know. These folks can come to church week after week and listen to me preach and walk away saying "I'm just not growing and learning..." Like that's my fault? Because certainly plenty of people ARE growing and learning! But what it comes down to for these folks is that they don't want that stuff, they want something else. So they go internet surfing and getting their theology down at Barnes and Nobles. They don't want to do what they already have been taught; they want something different.

But the reality is that growing in truth is dependent upon you actually practicing the truth you already know. Without holding to the foundations of scriptural teaching and truth, you are building your theological beliefs on 'shifting sand.' So Paul is stopping for a minute and telling the listener... "hey, before you move on, remember to do what you already know to do."

Spurgeon comments on this verse saying:

"Let us keep all the good that we have received; let us not give up the truth that we have learned; let us not leave the way along which we have traveled so far; and let us keep together, let perfect unity prove that the work of grace is going on in one as well as in another."