

Title: The Race of Knowing Christ: Pressing On

Text: Philippians 3:10-16

¹⁰ 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, ¹¹ so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

¹² I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. ¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

¹⁵ Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. ¹⁶ But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

Main Idea: The Christian life is a purposeful pursuit of being close with Christ, requiring focused effort and a forward-looking mindset, not resting on past achievements.

I. The Deep Desire: Knowing Christ Experientially (v. 10-11)

Paul's primary ambition, superseding any worldly or religious accomplishment, is an intimate, personal knowledge of Jesus Christ.

- **To Know Him Personally:** Paul desires an experiential knowledge of Christ, not just head knowledge (v. 10a). This deep relationship is of "surpassing worth" compared to anything else.
 - *Supporting References:*
 - **Jeremiah 9:23-24:** "Let not the wise boast in their wisdom... but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me."
 - **John 17:3:** "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."
 - **Ephesians 3:17-19:** That you may "come to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

- **To Experience His Power:** This knowledge includes experiencing "the power of his resurrection" in daily life, enabling victory over sin and fruitful living (v. 10b; Ephesians 1:19-20).
 - *Supporting References:*
 - **Ephesians 1:19-20:** A prayer for believers to understand "the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead."
 - **Romans 8:11:** "If the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you."
- **To Share in His Sufferings:** Knowing Christ also means participating in "the fellowship of his sufferings," accepting that following Jesus may involve difficulty and persecution (v. 10c; John 15:20).
 - *Supporting References:*
 - **John 15:20:** "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."
 - **2 Timothy 3:12:** "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."
 - **1 Peter 4:13:** "But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."
- **The Ultimate Hope:** The goal of this pursuit is to "attain the resurrection from the dead" (v. 11), the final glorification of the believer and eternal life with Christ.
 - *Supporting References:*
 - **1 Corinthians 15:51-52:** "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."
 - **Romans 8:30:** "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

Application Questions:

- **Priorities:** What is currently your greatest pursuit in life (career, family, comfort, etc.)? Does knowing Christ experientially surpass all other pursuits for you, as it did for Paul?
- **Power and Suffering:** How have you experienced the "power of his resurrection" in overcoming a specific sin this week? Are you prepared to accept the "fellowship of his sufferings" as a normal part of the Christian walk?

II. The Focused Effort: The Pursuit of the Prize (v. 12-14)

Paul acknowledges he has not yet reached perfection but is resolved to continue the race with maximum effort and a singular focus.

- **Acknowledging Imperfection:** Paul is not "already perfect" (v. 12). If the Apostle Paul felt this way, we must also recognize we have not "arrived" spiritually and cannot "coast" to the finish line.
 - *Supporting References:*
 - **1 Corinthians 13:9-10:** "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away."
 - **James 3:2:** "For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body."
- **Apprehended by Christ:** The motivation for our pursuit is that "Christ Jesus has made me his own" (v. 12). He took hold of us on the road to salvation so that we might take hold of Him and His purposes for our lives.
 - *Supporting References:*
 - **Acts 9:3-6:** The account of Christ stopping Saul on the road to Damascus.
 - **Ephesians 2:8-10:** "For by grace you have been saved through faith... For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works."
- **Forgetting the Past:** "One thing I do: Forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is ahead" (v. 13). This means letting go of past failures (guilt) and past successes (complacency) that might hinder progress, like a runner who doesn't look back during a race.

- *Supporting References:*

- **Isaiah 43:18-19:** "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"
- **Hebrews 12:1-2:** "Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus..."

- **Straining Toward the Goal:** The language here is that of an athlete stretching and striving forward with intense effort (v. 13). It is a "grace-empowered pursuit" that requires discipline, not passive waiting.

- *Supporting References:*

- **1 Corinthians 9:24-27:** "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it."
- **Luke 13:24:** "Strive to enter through the narrow door."

- **The Prize is Christ:** Paul presses "toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (v. 14). The prize is not just heaven, but being in the unhindered presence of God and knowing Christ fully.

- *Supporting References:*

- **Psalms 16:11:** "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."
- **Revelation 22:4:** "They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads."

Application Questions:

- **Hindrances:** What "weights" or specific sins (Hebrews 12:1) from your past—whether failures or past glories—are you struggling to "forget" and let go of?
- **Effort:** Are you actively "straining" in your spiritual race, or are you currently coasting? What specific spiritual discipline (prayer, Bible study, service) do you need to intensify this week to press forward?

III. The Mature Mindset: United in the Pursuit (v. 15-16)

The ongoing pursuit of Christ should be the standard mindset for all mature believers, lived out in unity with others.

- **A Mind Aligned with Paul's:** "All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things" (v. 15). Spiritual maturity involves having this relentless, forward-looking focus on Christ.
 - *Supporting References:*
 - **1 Corinthians 2:16:** "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."
 - **Ephesians 4:13:** Until we all attain "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."
- **God's Revelation for Disagreement:** For those who "think differently," Paul is confident God will "make that clear" to them (v. 15). This often happens through God's discipline, trials, or further study of His Word, leading them back to the correct perspective.
 - *Supporting References:*
 - **John 16:13:** "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth..."
 - **Acts 18:26:** "He [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."
- **Walking by the Same Rule:** Believers are urged to "live up to what we have already attained" (v. 16). We must hold fast to the progress we have made and continue to walk according to the established truths of the Gospel, in harmony with other believers.
 - *Supporting References:*
 - **Galatians 6:16:** "And as for all who walk by this rule—peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."
 - **Philippians 2:2:** "Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind."

Application Questions:

- **Maturity:** Does your life reflect the "mature mindset" Paul describes (v. 15)—a consistent, urgent focus on the upward call of God?
- **Unity:** How can you encourage unity in your local church by walking in step with the basic truths you have "already attained" (v. 16), rather than getting sidetracked by minor disagreements?