

Philippians 3:10-14 (NLT)

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, 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.*

In this series I have addressed our perspective about our past, and our future. Today I am concluding this series by focusing on our approach to the present; the “here and now”. Last week I mentioned that although Christianity is a future oriented worldview, a heavenly minded belief system, that doesn't mean it is irrelevant to earthy concerns. Being heavenly minded doesn't diminish your impact here and now. It magnifies it because it enables you to distinguish between trivial and significant matters. Unless your life is lived from an eternal perspective you will function with a distorted perspective.

Once we become free from dwelling on the past and gain a **clear** and **correct** vision for the future, we are ready to act. First we have to identify our “next step” towards the vision God has given us. But then we have to take action!! Paul writes. “One thing I do” – present tense. “I press on”, present tense.

No one can go back into the past and make a brand new start, but anyone can start now and make a brand new end!

The key words in that saying are “Start now”. Here is a very basic yet, essential reality No one has ever done anything yesterday or tomorrow – when they did it, they did it during TODAY!

We can reflect on the past and plan for the future, but action always takes place in the present.

Procrastination is trying to live in tomorrow.

Planning is not procrastination. Procrastination is leaving necessary action to the future when action can only be undertaken in the present.

The lazy person is not the person who does nothing, but the person who only does what he wants when he wants.

Action without reflection on the past leads to repeating the same mistakes. Aimless action that does not have a clear purpose or goal at which it is directed, is ineffective and inefficient. You get movement, but not progress. So we need the rearview mirror that enables reflection on the past decisions. We need the windshield that provides us with a clear and correct vision of our future destination, but we also need a gas pedal to make progress in the present.

Past reflection and future vision without present action leads to stagnation!

Thoughtful stagnation...but stagnation nevertheless!

The scripture is full of reminders that the only time we actually have at our disposal is the present: THIS IS THE DAY that the Lord has made, I will be glad and rejoice in it." Give us THIS DAY our daily bread. "Now is THE DAY of salvation." Choose you THIS DAY who you will serve. Encourage one another DAY after DAY.

And here is another important truth,

"You will only become in the future what you are becoming in the present!"

Paul learned to "press on" in the present from Jesus. One of my favorite statements in this passage is, "But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me." The word perfection in this context refers to the completion of a goal. That means Paul is pressing on to know Christ more and more until he arrives at the full and complete experience of knowing Christ that lies ahead. He expressed this very idea in 1 Corinthians 13:12 when he wrote, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

Paul is saying, "Jesus "pressed on" in obedience to the Father's will and out of love for me to possess me. Now I am pressing on to possess Him."

1. Press on through Criticism

Paul learned from Jesus how to press on in the face of criticism.

In Hebrews 12:1,2 we read, "Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame" for the joy that was ahead of him."

During Jesus life he was criticized for not following the traditional interpretations of the Mosaic Law, for violating religious customs, for eating and drinking too much, for using for hanging out with sinners, and worst of all...for being empowered by the Devil.

In his final days Jesus' was mocked, berated, and accused of evil; but he pressed on because of the joy that he knew would be his in the future! It was the joy of his inheritance. Do you know what the inheritance was that Jesus was pressing on in the present so He could receive in the future? It wasn't the return to His glorified position at the right hand of the Father. It wasn't His glorified body never subject to another nail, or another thorn, or another spear. Ephesians 1:18 proclaims a remarkably wonderful truth. In it we find this description of those who have become children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. They are "***His holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance***". His inheritance is you and me...and all those who by faith have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God as a result of his atoning death for our sins. Jesus was criticized for not fasting, not honoring the Sabbath, for drinking too much, for hanging out with sinners.

Paul also pressed on through criticism.

He was criticized for not preaching with the eloquence and power of a "true apostle". He was too weak, lacked the boldness and authority that an apostle should project. (2 Corinthians 10:1,2).

Criticism poses a danger for us in that it makes us vulnerable to self-doubt, which can stop us in our tracks. Many Christians have been shamed into silence by those wielding the club of criticism against Christian morality and doctrine. Critics will try to shame you into stopping by either labeling you as foolish or hateful. Your intellect and your morals will be criticized. You might be called a fool if you express belief that the Bible is inspired by God, that Jesus is God, and that he rose again. Biblical truth and values are now considered morally repugnant. If you hold to a biblical view of morality concerning marriage or biblical doctrines such as the revelation that is no salvation outside of faith in Jesus you will be criticized.

Some people will criticize you if you attempt to engage in some meaningful selfless pursuit for the sake of others.

There was a paper published several years ago in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology entitled, “The Desire to Expel Unselfish Members From the Group”, that cited four different studies that revealing that unselfish workers who are the first to offer to help with projects are among those that co-workers like the least. Unselfish workers are often resented because they “raise the bar” for what’s expected of everyone.

When do decide to do things the right way, when you choose righteousness be ready for criticism. It will come because it will shine greater light on someone’s unrighteousness and that will breed resentment.

2. Press on through Discomfort

You know the saying, “No pain, no gain!” That applies to our pursuit of God’s will as well as it does to making progress in any worthwhile endeavor.

Pressing on towards the preferred future that God wills for us will not always be easy or comfortable.

Nothing could be more discomfoting than the cross. When we think of Jesus’ “pressing on” to complete His mission to redeem us, our minds naturally think about the cross. But Jesus “pressed on” though not only physical pain, but emotional and psychological pain as well which can be as excruciating as physical pain. Jesus experienced both. Jesus was tempted to run away from His mission before the first blow landed on his face; before the first lash tore open his back, before the first spike was driven into His flesh. Prior to His arrest, Jesus said, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death”. And yet...he didn’t quit. He kept pressing on. He pressed on for you...for me!

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, not while he was on the beach, but while he was in a prison cell.

He was imprisoned and suffered countless beatings. Five times he received 39 lashes and three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned. In addition, his mission from God led him to be shipwrecked three times, to experience hunger and thirst, cold and exposure. And then there was the emotional psychological discomfort: He wrote that on a daily basis he experienced anxiety for all the churches. Paul described his experiences in pursuing God’s plan for him with these words: “We are afflicted in every way,

but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” (2 Corinthians 4:8,9)

3. Press on through Confusion

Jesus cried out in the garden three times: “Father, if there is some way for me to be spared from this suffering, please let me be spared...but if this is your will I accept it. Jesus expressed uncertainty about the Father’s will. He wasn’t sure if there was another way. Then on the cross he cried, “My God, My God...WHY have you forsaken me????!?!?!? This was a cry, not of mere uncertainty but of confusion: Why?!!!????

Paul wrote, “We are perplexed but not driven to despair. The word translated perplexed can be variously translated as uncertain, bewildered, “at a loss for what to do”, or confused. Paul had his share of “Why, Lord? Moments.

What are your “why’s”? God often deals with us like we deal with our children. They constantly ask, “Why?” Sometimes we can explain the “why” but other times the best response we can give them is, “Just trust me!” That is often all that we hear from God, but it is enough because He has proven that we can trust Him.

When you find yourself troubled by what you don’t understand; take refuge in what you do understand. When confused by what you don’t know, take your stand confidently on what you do know!

Paul was able to press on through criticism, discomfort and confusion to fulfill his goal to know Jesus and proclaim the good news about Jesus... **because Jesus pressed on for him.** You and I can press on towards our destiny of knowing and becoming like Jesus because Jesus pressed on for us.