



Message Transcript

Back on Track

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Well, thank you so much for choosing to worship with us today. Happy New Year, great to be back here. And you should know, last week I had the privilege of preaching up at our Broomfield Campus, which is rare for me. But it was an incredible day, having nearly 400 people that were there on Sunday and two services. God is doing an amazing work there.

When Kim and I left from Broomfield and driving home on the way, we just said, what a blessing it is, what God is building, what God is doing. And they're going to be joining us here on Tuesday. For our first Tuesday, that begins at 6:30. There's a free meal at 5:30. Would encourage you all to be back as we seek the face of the Lord in prayer.

And with that, let's go before the Lord this morning. Let's prepare our hearts for his living and active word among us. Lord Jesus, we just thank you and praise you for who you are. We thank you, Lord. That you're a God that speaks. That you're a God who desires us to know who you are. And that Lord, you're here with us now.

And so Lord, I'm asking for your help to be... Help me to be faithful as I preach your living and active word. And Lord, that you'd be helpful to us. Because Lord, we believe that every time your word is open and faithfully proclaimed that you speak to all those who are ready to hear. And so Lord, our desire is to hear what you have to say.

And if you're gathered here today and you desire to hear what the Lord has to say to you, and believe what he said as about himself and that you will by faith put into practice what he shows you. Will you agree with me this morning by very loudly saying

the word amen. Amen. Well, this tends to the time of year where people start setting what are called New Year's resolutions.

I've had fun in all of our services asking this, this weekend, by show of hands, how many have set least one New Year's resolution? At least one. This is the service with the most people that have done that, actually. How many have said, "I've done that before. I know I'll never keep them anyway, I'm done setting New Year's resolutions." Right?

Okay. Regardless of where you're at, this tends to be the kind of the time of year where people take inventory of where they're at, whether we're talking or health or relationally. Or we start to think about how do we want to spend the upcoming year? And everybody's got their own advice for how to do that. Last year, we took a look at Psalm 118:24 and talked about, "This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

It's great that when we open up God's word, he doesn't just tell us about the year 2020. He tells us how to live every single day. And regardless of where you are. If you're the kind of person like, "Man, I have great goals. I'm going after them this year." Or you say, "I really don't care."

Spiritually, God has some things that he wants to share with you that will not only be true today in January, but will be true in February and in March and in late October and in December. And would be true every day for the rest of your life, because God's word is living and active. God's word is eternal.

And so for those of you here today who want to hear what the Lord would have to say to you about how to keep on track or get back on track or keep your walk with Jesus going, let's see what today is all about. Because for all of us, we come in here, some of us come in here not even having a relationship with God through the person of Jesus Christ.

We're kind of exploring. This will help you to get on track with that. Some of us have been with Jesus, but kind of fall off a little bit and just need to be renewed in our mind of who we are in Christ. And others of us, we've been walking with the Lord, but could just use a boost in where we're going in this upcoming year. Wherever you are, God has a word for you this morning.

So I want to invite you to open up this morning to the book of Philippians. The book of Philippians, we're going to be in chapter three this morning, starting in verse 12. And just to bring you up to speed, because we haven't been in that book for a while. The book of Philippians is one of my personal favorite books. Paul had a great love for the Philippian church.

He had spent time with them, as a matter of fact, many people in the Philippian church had taken care of him when he was in prison. And so as he writes to them, he writes to them with great encouragement. He starts out by telling them he's been praying for them. And he believes that the God who created a good work in we'll continue it on until the day of completion in Christ Jesus.

He talks about his imprisonment, and how that's turned out for the greater good

because he's gotten to share the gospel. And the whole praetorian guard and everyone else also know that his chains are for Christ. Then he begins to teach him how to live in humility the way Christ did in chapter two. Talks about his two buddies Timothy and Epaphroditus that live that.

And in chapter three, he begins to give his spiritual resume and basically says, "If anybody had a right to put their trust in their flesh or their religious accomplishments, it would be him, but he counts all that as a rubbish to the surpassing knowledge of knowing Jesus Christ as a savior."

And now he says, "I want to participate in his sufferings. I want to know Christ. And I look forward to the glorious resurrection." And that's where we pick up, in chapter three in verse 12. Let me read these verses to you, 12-16, and then we'll unpack them together as we take a look as to what God would have this say for us, how we might want to live, not only this year, but every day of our life.

Here's what he says. "Not that I've already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet. But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what lays ahead."

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude. And if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you. However, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained." And here, what you're hearing

in the Apostle Paul is here's how we can live.

I mean, in light of God's coming resurrection, in light of us who know Jesus, then how should we live our lives every single day of our life? And he really spells out four ways that we can live that will be applicable to you not only today, but every day that you wake up for the rest of your life. These are four areas that you're going to want to revisit, four areas that you're going to want to track, four areas you're going to want to see where you're at.

And the first is this. He tells us to live with a renewed passion in Christ. He tells us to live with a renewed passion in Christ. As he talks of about wanting to attain the resurrection of the dead, here's what he says in verse 12. "Not that I've already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus."

I find these some of the more comforting words in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul, if there's anybody that knew the grace of God through salvation it was the Apostle Paul. He preached what we proclaim here. That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. That he was buried and that he was raised according to the scriptures. That Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life.

Which means if you're here today and you've never trusted in Jesus Christ, you don't have a relationship with God. It's why God seems distance. And it's why God seems far away. And here's the good news. God, the father sent his son to be the savior of the world. What you could never do to get to God, you couldn't go to church

enough, be good enough, earn it enough. God did for you by sending his son.

Jesus Christ fulfilled the law. Jesus Christ died on the cross. He took all the father's wrath for your sin, and then he was buried. But because he is God, he was raised from the dead. He's as alive as he's ever been. And he's offered life to all who believe in his name. When you repent of your sins and you trust Jesus Christ, you confess him as your personal Lord and savior. Let me tell you about how many sins are gone. All your sins are gone.

They've all been washed away. Past, present, future, they're washed. You're cleansed. You're pure. If anybody understood that, it was the Apostle Paul. If anybody understood his identity, it was the Apostle Paul. If there was anybody who knew that it was a certainty that he was going to be glorified with Jesus, it was the Apostle Paul.

And yet, how does he start this? "Not that I've obtained this already, or I've already been made perfect." I mean, that should be like, huh. It should bring great comfort to you, because as Christ sometimes, even if we don't say it out loud, sometimes we try to perform in such a way where we think our life and Christ, "We're doing really good. We're doing perfect. I mean, I'm better than I was. I'm better than I was."

Here's what Paul would say, "I haven't obtained it already. I haven't already been made perfect. I mean, my identity is. I'm righteous. I'm loved. I'm holy. I'm good. But I haven't arrived where I need to be yet. And I'm straining towards that." And if the Apostle Paul, who in church history may rank as the primary foremost missionary

theologian, certainly in the top 10 of God's hall of fame, or something like that.

If he says, "I haven't made it. I haven't attained it yet." How much more so should that bring us comfort? And what was he trying to say? He was trying to say, "I'm not complacent about this thing." See, for many of us in the Christian faith, we'll go back to when we got saved and we'll tell people I got saved when I was 18. I got saved when I was 30. I got saved when I was five. That's fair to say.

But many of us say that as a complacent statement like, "Yeah, that's something that happened a long time ago and I'm fine with that. God's going to save me. I know I'm forgiven. It's no big deal." That's not how Paul treated his salvation. Notice what he says. "I press on to take hold of that, which was taken hold of by Christ Jesus." Well, what did Christ take hold of for him?

Christ took hold of his life because Jesus Christ saved him. And because God had saved him, what was Paul saying? "I'm going to spend all my days renewing my passion with Jesus and having great devotion for him. I'm not going to rest on my laurels. I'm going to renew my passion in him." So how do you renew your passion? I mean, just think about your life right now.

I mean, think about your passion for Jesus Christ. I mean, even those of us who believe the gospel, it's easy for our passion level to sometimes subside or fall. Or some of you, you can get married and your passion is white hot, but for some of you it kind of trails off. How do you renew passion? I remember when Kim and I were dating and when we got married.

I mean, just to go to a movie and get dinner. I mean, it was awesome. I mean, we'd hold hands. We'd walk in the movie. We'd pay \$1.25 and you know, not really. And then we'd go out to dinner and we'd sit there. And there was no texting back when we dated, because if you texted, texting was just coming out. Remember that, like if you had a word that started with a C, you had to hit that letter three times like ABC and you had to wait for the cursor to move.

So people really didn't text. So nobody's interrupting you. And it was just us and we're just having fun and it's all that. But today, if we said, "Hey, let's just catch dinner and a movie." It may not have the same passion. So what do you do? Well, you got to renew the passion. You got to make sure that the person is what you're passionate about and that you mix things up to be passionate about that person.

In other words, so many messages this time of year revolve around what spiritual disciplines you need to do, which sometimes can be just more routine of doing the same thing you've always done. Right? How do you mix it up? I mean, I look at you. I haven't been here in a couple weeks, and I can tell where some of y'all are because you've been sitting in the same seat for the last five years. I mean, you haven't moved.

I mean, just to break up the routine and sit on the other side of the church would feel uncomfortable for you. Right? So how do we break up this routine with Jesus? And what does it look like? Think about it like this. There's a lot of things that we can do, but we can just go through the motions. Like when you come to worship, I mean, we start off our worship by singing praises to God.

And yet, so often I look around and so many people don't sing. If you want to renew your passion, here's an idea, sing. Sing the songs. Don't just look at them on the screen, sing them. And don't just sing them because somebody's sitting next to you. Sing them to Jesus. There's truth in the lyrics that we're singing so that you can participate in the worship of God.

Maybe for some of you, changing it up would be that you kneel when you feel like kneeling. Maybe some of you would even be so bold as to raise your hands to show the Lord, "That Lord, I'm in surrender of you. And I love you. And I give you all the praise and you're worthy of that." I don't know what it looks like. Maybe it's just worshiping the Lord different. Like during the week, because we have a tendency to worship God in our compartments.

We have our Bible study. We have our reading time where we do this. But when it comes to this part of our life, we really don't invite God in. Maybe there's ways you can invite God into other areas where you don't normally invite him into. Where when you're at a store or at a restaurant, where you begin to pray about, "Lord, who are the people that you're bringing in my life that I get to share the love of Christ with today. And how would you like me to do that?"

Where God gets to go with you in a new way where you can renew your passion by sharing your faith. Or how about this one. We tend to think, wrongly so, that our Christian faith is about me and Jesus. It's just the two of us, but really God created the body called the church because the way we thrive is in community when we're

ministering to and with one another.

So maybe this year, maybe you've been reading the Bible, maybe even praying and maybe even worshiping and coming to church. But maybe there's that next step you need to take where, "Hey, there's other people in this body that I can get close to, that I can mutually minister, that can mutually minister to me so that collectively we can encourage each other to grow better in Christ."

Maybe you read your Bible in the morning. Maybe you need to read it during the day. I mean, I don't know what it is, but how do you mix it up so that you're not just going through the routine that says I did it, I checked the box. I read my devotion. I did this, I did this, I did this. And I'm not against habits. I think habits can be good if the habits are about the person that you're creating the habit for.

Like there's nothing wrong with having a date night. Unless it's like, "Huh, it's Thursday, it's date night. I got to go on a date." Then it doesn't really have the passion anymore. So mix it up, make it about the person. Or who's the person we're making this about? We're making it about Jesus. And here's what Paul was saying. "I haven't obtained it already. I haven't already been made perfect, but here's what I do. I'm pursuing Christ. I want to be passionate about Christ."

Here's another way that you can grow On your passion. You get this holy dissatisfaction about where you are. In other words, when you get dissatisfied with something, one of two things either happens. You either say, "I'm dissatisfied and I'm okay with being dissatisfied." Or you get dissatisfied and you say, "I'm so dissatisfied.

I can't take it anymore. I'm going to do something about it."

I mean, when it comes to people doing health goals, it's why the gyms are crowded every first two weeks in January. Because people get this dissatisfaction where like, "I don't like the way I look. I don't like the way I feel. I'm going to do something about it. I'm going." There's other people that say, I don't like the way I look. I don't like the way I feel and I'm fine with that." And that's okay too.

Holy dissatisfaction means, "You know what, Lord, show me the ways in my life that I'm not living to the full with you. And what does that look like for me to pursue you?" Because the question becomes, not what spiritual disciplines do I need to do? The question is, how can I grow my passion for you Jesus? For some of you, God's been prompting you to be more generous, stewarding your resources. And it scares you to death.

Because you're like, "Well, if I steward resources to God, then how's God going to take care of me?" But by faith, I can tell you God will. So what does it look like for you to stir up your passion, where you are taking a step of faith with the Lord? Because here's what the devil will want you to do every time. Just be complacent, stay where you are. You're fine. It's no big deal.

You know you're saved. Just don't do anything. You're fine. That's not how the apostle Paul treated his life nor did any of the apostles. Paul knew that he was saved. Paul knew that he was saved to the full. Paul knew that he was loved. He was adopted. He was holy. Paul knew he was a co-heir with Christ in all of his riches. He

knew he had a new identity and yet here's what he said, "I haven't obtained it already. I haven't already been made perfect. Here's what I'm yearning for."

"I'm yearning for the resurrection of the saints. When I will be with people, men and women, boys and girls from every tribe, tongue and nation who have proclaimed the name of Jesus and trusted his blood for their salvation. And I can't wait for that day. And until I get there, I am renewing my passion with Jesus on a daily basis." So what does that mean for you? I mean, what does that mean for you? What would it look like to stir things up for you?

It means this, it doesn't mean you sit here and say, "Well, I'm going to read the Bible more. I'm going to pray more. I'm going to give more. That's not what it means. It means you go before the Lord and you say, "Lord, how can I grow in my devotion for you? What are some of the things that I can do?"

And we have this false image in our head of the right way to do everything spiritually. We have this false image in our head that if you're really a Christian, you wake up at 5:00 AM every single day, you open your Bible to your Bible reading plan. You read the three chapters you're supposed to read. God speaks to you wisely. Then you pray for another hour after that. You're so full of the spirit, you can't even contain yourself.

Then you get up and you walk out of your house singing worship songs, and the day just gets better after that. That's not real. That's just not real every single day, it does doesn't work that way. What are the ways that you can invite Jesus into all the

areas of your life so that your devotion and your passion for him are growing and by faith you see him at work in your life?

This is what the Apostle Paul was saying, that he stirs all that up, because here's the reality. We know this. If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always got. If you're stagnant in your passion for Jesus, go before the Lord and ask him, "Lord, how can I grow in my devotion and passion for you?" And then by faith, be obedient to what he says. And it'll be different for each and every one of us, but the goal will be the same.

The goal will be, honoring the Lord in all that we do as we renew our passion for Christ. He goes on to say the same thing at the beginning of verse 12. "Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect." Notice verse 13, "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it." Hey brothers, friends, I haven't got there yet. I know who I am. I know what I'm going to be, but in this middle, I'm not resting on my laurels.

I'm going after everything I have. I am pursuing God. Renew your passion every day. That's not just true in January of 2020. That's true every single day for the rest of your life. The question God wants you to ask is how can you renew your passion for him and renew your passion in him? Secondly, as your passion gets renewed, here's what Paul says. "You need to live with a released past to Christ. You need to live with a released past to Christ."

Notice what he says in the middle of verse 13. "But one thing I do, forgetting

what lies behind." One thing I do. One thing I do. When you see these words in the Bible, one thing, it's pointing out something very important. Remember when Jesus met the rich young ruler. And the rich young ruler was asking Jesus, "What must I do to be saved?" And Jesus said, "Well, you know the commandments." And the rich young ruler said, "Well, I've done all these since I was a boy. I've kept them all."

And what did Jesus say to the rich young ruler? "One thing you lack." And then he told him, "Go, sell everything you have and then come follow me and your reward will be great in heaven. And the man went away sad." Because Jesus could do what, he laid his finger on the one thing that was getting in the way of his allegiance. One thing. Or how about the blind man in John 9, when he was healed and people were giving him grief and all the religious leaders were coming after him.

What'd he say, "One thing I know, I was blind and now I see." He did it. I mean, one thing, really important. Or what about when Martha was making preparations for Jesus around the house and her sister Mary was just kind of sitting at Jesus' feet. And Martha's getting all perturbed because Martha's setting up, she's cooking the meal, she's making sure the house is clean. And her sister Mary is just sitting at Jesus's feet.

And she's like, "Jesus, tell my sister something." And what does Jesus say to her? He tells her this, "Martha, only one thing is needed." One thing, what was the one thing? The one thing was to sit at the feet of Jesus. Or how about David in Psalm 27:4, he says, "One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in his temple." One thing.

So when Paul says one thing I do, he's making a point to say, this is of utmost important. Not only do I renew my passion, I release my past. Because he says, "One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind." Friends, as believers in Christ, one of the hardest things that we'll ever have to do is let go of the past. One of the hardest things to do to walk with God is to let go of the past and to release it.

And here's why, because all of us, no matter who we are, have a very, very difficult time of letting go of the past. For different reasons. Some of us is because of accomplishments and successes and everything that went really well. And we look back on the past and we say, "Those were the good old days. And I remember what it was like. And if things could be like that now, like financially and success wise, and who I used to be and who I was. And if it could just be like that, then my life would be good."

When you think in those categories, you cannot take a step forward because all you're thinking about is who you used to be, what life used to be like. And really what you're praying for is God, take me backwards to where I used to be. Others of you, it's not past successes. It's past hurts, past disappointments, past sins. Some of you have sinned to sins that you wish you would never have been involved in.

And that voice comes in your head that says, "You should have known better. You could have known better. Why'd you act like this? That's a mark on your life." I mean, and there's all sorts of them that Satan will use. He'll use immorality in your life. He'll use foul language. He'll use hurting another person. He'll use something you did to

cheat somebody else. And then he'll call you by that name. And he'll call you a cheater or an adult or a pornographer or a drunk or a drug addict.

And he'll use your past to try to label you. And then there's a third group of people and you say, "Well, I'm not looking back at my past successes. And I'm really not disappointed about things I did. But let me tell you about me, Jeff. It was somebody that acted upon me and did something to me that I didn't even ask to be done to me, and it hurts. And I was abused. And I was angry. And I didn't deserve that."

And so there's unforgiveness. And unforgiveness means this. Whether you're dealing with successes, whether you're dealing with your own past sins or whether you're dealing with hurts from other people, here's what it's like. It's as if you drop an anchor in the past, tie it with a rope to yourself and then try to walk forward with God. And you just can't do it. You can't move.

I mean, it may seem like you're moving, but really when you're moving it's kind of like one of those inflatable blowups that kids do at carnivals, where they tether themselves to the bungee cord and then they try to run as far as they can, until the bungee cord snaps them back. And they find that fun. At my age, I wouldn't find that fun. Okay.

But spiritually, it's never fun because you can hear the message and you can hear how God loves you and you can hear how there's joy and there's hope and there's peace and there's favor and there's blessing. But every time you go to take that

one step forward, you get yanked back. And the enemy's desire for the nonbeliever is to blind them, so they never come to know Christ.

The enemy's desire for the believer, since he's lost you forever, is to keep you from taking a step closer to him. And Paul says, "One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind." Now forgetting, let's talk about the word forgetting. The Bible says when God forgives, he forgets. Now, God's omniscient. He knows all things. God does not have the luxury to forget. When God forgives our sins and forgets them, it doesn't mean like, "Oh man, I don't even remember you did that."

And that's not what it means. What it means is God is never ever going to bring it up again. He's never going to hold it to our account. Forgiving and forgetting does not mean that I won't remember what happened to me. It means I'm not going to let that be part of who I am anymore. I'm not calling myself by the names the devil calls me in the past. I'm not going to live that way. I'm going to begin to walk forward, because here's how God sees you.

If you're a believer in Christ, here's how he sees you. He sees you as his daughter, that he loves beyond a shadow of a doubt or his son that he loves, that he's so proud of. That's who you are. And when you see yourself as that, you can let go of your past. It's not what your former identity was. You're not labeled by your accomplishments. You're not labeled by your scars. You're not labeled by your past. You're labeled by who you are in Christ.

And that's what Paul's saying, "Forgetting what lies and going for what is ahead."

Now, if you don't forget what lies behind, you cannot move forward. Right? And most of us, even if we hear messages like this, like we want to let go. But we can't. I'll give you an example. I learned a water ski when I was about 10 years old, and I was a pretty good athlete.

And I watched my friend do it a couple times. I'm like, "I can do that." And so I got in the water. I put the skis on. They showed me how to hold the rope. They told me what to do. They told me how to point my skis. They told me how the boat would pull me up. They said, lean back, let the boat get you. I got all those instructions. Last thing they told me is if you go in the water, let go of the rope.

Now, I heard everything they said, but I didn't pay attention to the last instruction. And so I remember I was kind of getting up, getting up, getting up. And then many people that are beginners are starting to feel my weight go forward, and I was trying to fight it. And I went down in the water. Now, I don't know how much of the lake I drank that day, but it was more than I needed to because I was holding on thinking by holding on.

If I'm holding on to that, which is the power. And if I'm holding onto that, which is pulling me. Eventually, it back on my feet. Eventually, I let go. And when I let go, all the power and everything that was holding me was gone. But guess what, it came circling back. So let's try this again. That's what the grace of God is like. See, some of you can't move forward, because you're holding on and you're holding on and you're holding on.

You're hoping somebody in your past gets punished. You're hoping that God will take you back to that place you used to be. You're hoping people will know you as this person. You're holding on, but really all you're doing is drinking the lake. When you let go and you say, "Okay. God, I'm done being that person. I'm done being that guy. I'm done being that girl. I want to be who I am now."

Watch the grace of God come and teach you how to get back on your feet. And he will pull you in a whole new direction. Right? And the beauty of it is this, it's way more fun to water ski when you're on the water than in the water. That's been my experience. It's way more fun to walk with God when it's his grace that's propelling you forward rather than your effort that's trying to hold yourself up.

And what Paul is saying here is as you renew your passion in Christ, release your past. In other words, Jesus said this when he was calling his disciples. He said, "Anyone who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of heaven." In other words, don't look back. When Jesus was calling Lot's family out of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, he told them he was going to reign down fire from heaven.

He told them, "Don't look back." And as they were exiting the city, what happened? Lot's wife turned back and she turned into a pillar of salt. There is such a tendency in our lives as we walk forward with Christ, because we can't see where he's taking us and we can't see what it's going to look like. And we can't what we're going to be.

And we can't see what we're going to become, to want to look back to hold on to part of our past so we can walk forward. And here's what Paul says, "I don't do that. One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind." I don't let my past successes, which he had plenty, past failures, which he had plenty. I don't let any of those things anchor me. I let them go and I live presently in the grace of God today. If you don't let it go, you can't move forward.

That's right.

Let me just say this, because I've said this in all of our services this week. And it came to me last night, I didn't prepare to say it, but there are some of you here whose marriages are crippled because one or the both of you has something in your past that you haven't let go. And instead of letting it go, you're punishing the one that you're with.

Some of you as husbands are hurting your wives because of your past that you haven't let go. And some of you wives are hurting your husbands because of some of your past you haven't let go. And some of you are hurting each other because of your past. But if you could live in your new identity as sons and daughters are the most high God presently forgetting what lies behind, you can move forward.

God wants us all to move forward, release your past. I mean, the question becomes this. Is there anything that keeps your head on a swivel that keeps you wanting to turn back either for successes or failures or hurts, and have you kind of go like this? If those are there, here's what the Lord said, "Release those to me." Because I have really good news for you this morning. Okay?

At the cross of Jesus Christ and through his shed blood, you can be made new in a moment. It means, if you need to forgive somebody. I can't promise you if you forgive them that all the pain's going to go away right now, because unlikely it will not. But I can't promise you this. If you begin to forgive somebody today, over time as that thorn has come out, God will bring healing to where that pain was.

If you failed in your past, just look around because I want to give you great comfort. I want you to have you raise your hand, but just catch eyes with people around this room. The only group of people we have here are failures and sinners. That's all we have. So when you're looking at people in this room, every single person here has failed in some way that's grievous to them.

Every single person in here today has something in their life they wouldn't want to go on the screen behind them, every single one of us. And so when it comes to church, sometimes we falsely believe that if we're here, everything needs to be going really well and we're doing it great. And we've always done it great. There's not one person here that can make that testimony.

We're all here for one reason alone, because the grace of God through Jesus Christ and his shed blood and resurrection gives us life. Amen. And you can have life in his name. That's why he says renew your passion, release your past. And once you've renewed your passion, release your past, then you can do this. You can live with a relentless pursuit of Christ. You can live with a relentless pursuit of Christ.

Notice the end of verse 13 and 14, after he says one thing I do, forgetting what

lies behind and what? "And reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." One thing I do, these are all tied together. We're just breaking it down. One thing I did, forgetting what lies behind and stray towards what lies ahead. That's what I do.

That's the one thing I do. Daily Paul's saying, "I'm letting go of my past and I'm striving towards my future, because what's coming is better than anything I've ever experienced." Let me tell you this. If you're a believer in Christ Jesus, I can tell you this on the authority of God's word, no matter what awesome accomplishments you've had in this world, no matter how good you think life has been. It's nothing compared to what's coming.

I mean, what we have to look forward to is incredible. Paul says, "One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, straining towards what lies ahead." I mean, your best day is coming. And that's what Paul says he gives himself to. Now, I love this imagery because we have this imagery of running. Paul often used athletic language when he wrote. Remember when he wrote to Timothy and 2 Timothy 4:7. He says, "I have fought the good fight." Right.

I have finished the race. I've kept the faith, I mean, faith. He's got boxing. He's got running. Ephesians 6:12, he's got wrestling. He says, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood." 1 Corinthians 9:26, he goes back to running and boxing. He says, "I run in such a way as not without aim. I box in such a way as not beating the air." What's he talking about? He's talking about in everything I do for Jesus, I have great intentionality.

Pursuing Jesus is to give him first place in your life. Pursuing Jesus is to give him the kind of intentionality that a professional or Olympic athlete would give to their trade. I mean, it is giving him your best. It is making him your focus. I mean, picture like this. When you see the Discovery Channel or you see a hungry animal go after one that's wandered off. I mean, they're not thinking about what sleep's going to be like that night.

They're not talking about how they're going to hang out together and lick each other's fur. They're doing one thing, they're hungry and they're going to pursue until they eat. This is the imagery you get here. Paul is using athletic language to talk about straining towards the finish line and running as if you're the one who's going to win.

And Paul's saying this, "Forget what lies behind. And I'm going to give all my best effort to make Jesus Christ first place in my life." So here's the rhetorical question. What is it in your life that's hindering Jesus Christ from being first place in your life? Probably, different for each and every one of us. But what is it that keeps Jesus Christ from being first place?

What is it that keeps your intentionality from being first and foremost Jesus? What is it that gets in the way? Because whatever that is, that's not something that God just wants to reveal to you right now through his holy spirit and say, "Yeah, that's probably this. It's probably this." It's him saying, "It's this, and I want you to do something about it."

Now, if you feel conviction on this when we get to talking about it. It's not

because God's up in heaven saying, "Yeah, you don't give me first place and I hate you and I don't love you anymore." That's not what you're feeling. What you're feeling in your heart is the holy spirit showing you. I love you so much. Let me tell you how much I love you. I came to this world and died for you.

I rose from the grave. I gave you victory. I gave you life. I am showing you what's hindering your walk with me because in me you can have life and have it to the full. In me is hope, in me is joy, in me are all the things that you're looking for. So what hinders you from giving God first place? I mean, even the author of Hebrews tells us, when he tells us to run the race with perseverance marked out us.

He tells us to get rid of every sin and every encumbrance. Which means this, for some of you, the thing that's getting in the way of Jesus Christ being first place in your life, it's just flat out sin. I mean, you know it's wrong. God's shown you it's wrong and it's sinful. And here's what he would tell you to do, repent of it and give it to him.

See, because most of us in church, when we start feeling conviction, here's what we tend to think. "Yeah. I'm going to work on that a little bit more this week. I'm going to get that right. I'm not coming back into church feeling that guilt anymore. I'm going to get it right." You can work on it for the rest of your life, you can't get it right. Here's how I know that. I know you couldn't get it right or Jesus Christ wouldn't have had to come and die for you. Right?

I mean, so when you feel conviction, it's not for you to go fix it. It's for you to release it to Christ and let him fix it for you. It's for you to get to a place where you

have the authenticity to tell God, "You're right, this is wrong. I confess it." But for others of you in here, it's not sin. And for others of you might even be sitting here kind of smug saying, "I can't think of any sin in my life that's hindering that."

"I mean, I'm looking for Jesus. I come to church every week. I tithe. I mean, I give to God. I pray. I read my Bible." I mean, so here's what it is. What are the things that are hindering? They may not even sinful things. They may actually be good things. They may be actually the thing the world celebrates and says, that's a good thing. There's nothing wrong with that. But for you, you know that's hinder Jesus being first place in your life.

I mean, let me just give you a couple. This might be personal testimony time for me. What about screens? Screens, like your phone, your TV, your computer, laptop, in your car. I mean, how much time do you spend looking at a screen versus, how much time do you spend seeking Jesus' face? Just a rhetorical question. I mean, add up all the movies and sporting events you've watched over the holidays, and then compare that to the amount of time you spent seeking the face of Jesus.

I mean, could it be that that takes up more of your time, more of your energy? I mean, could it be sports? Could it be money? Could it be your pursuit of money? Could it be the pursuit of relationships? Could it be the pursuit of convenience? Could it be the pursuit of your own time so that you have time to do whatever you want to do whenever you want to do it rather than serving the Lord?

I mean, I don't know what hinders you. Could it be the way you eat. Could it be

the way you don't eat. Could it be the way that you handle different things. What is it that the holy spirit would show you, "Hey, this is keeping me from being first place in your life." Now, when he shows you that he's not showing you that just because he is saying, "You're forgiven, don't worry about it."

He's showing you that because he's saying, "Hey, listen, if you could, by faith, relinquish this to me and start stepping in a new direction with me. Hey, your passion will grow. Your heart for me will grow. Your love for me will grow and life will be more full." So what hinders your walk with him? One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining towards what lies ahead. Right?

What's hindering your devotion for Christ. I mean, as he shows you that this morning, here's what he's telling you. He's like, "I'm asking you not to hear me. I'm asking you by faith to release that to me because Jesus says, I want to be for place in your life. I want to have authority in your life. I want to know that I can direct you any way that you need to go."

And see, if you have a renewed passion and you have a released past and you have a relentless pursuit of Christ, then you can get to this final one. You can live with a resolute purity for Christ. Living with a resolute purity. Now, all four of these go together. And all four of these are things that we need to consider at all times because it's not like, "Well, I'll work on number one. And then I'll work on number two, and maybe one day I'll get to number."

These are all things that collectively we're working on. Notice what he says. In

verse 14, he says, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Now, let's think about calling for a second. We talk about callings. What we're called to do. We often think about it as a vocation, but here's the call. If you're a believer, here's your calling.

You want to know what your calling is? Listen to this in 1 Peter 5:10. He says, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you." Here's your calling. That the God of the universe has called you to his eternal glory in Christ. That's your calling.

You are being pulled toward the future where you're going to stand with the living God perfected in him. That's your calling. That's what you're called to. Now, in light of that, because you're going to be standing with the perfect righteous savior. Then he tells us how we should live. Notice what he says. And he says in the next verses, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect," which is kind of a metaphor.

Because he's already gotten done saying, "I'm not perfect. I haven't obtained all this, but let anybody who thinks he's perfect." Meaning, he's talking now about identity in Christ. That we've been made perfect in Christ. He says this, "Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, to have this attitude. And if in anything you have a different attitude. God will reveal that also to you."

Here's the great thing. If you're in Christ and you're pursuing Christ and you're going after Christ, I watch Christians worry all the time. What if I get it wrong? What if

I take the wrong job? What if I marry the wrong person? What if I do this? What if I spend my money wrong? We're all worried about things we don't even need to worry about.

When you're pursuing Christ and you're going after Christ, Christ has the ability to speak into your life about the direction you're going. If your prayer is Lord, I want to honor you. And I want to go your way. You will know in your own spirit whether the Lord's saying, "Yeah, total peace there. I'm going to go for that." Or agitation, irritate. I'm bothered by, I can't move that way.

I can't go that way. That's not for me. If you're single and you want to get married and you're pursuing Christ, you're like, "Lord, I just want to know that this person that I'm marrying honors you, and that this brings me peace. And this brings you glory and brings you great joy." You'll know, because there'll be peace. And the Lord will be like, "Go for it." And you'll know if the Lord's like, "No, no, no, no. Don't. Stop. Break up, dude." You'll know that too.

That's how the Lord works. And oftentimes, he gives us peace and oftentimes he gives us [inaudible 00:40:24], so we know what to do. Which also means this, we don't need to control one another either. Isn't that good news? That the spirit of the living God inside of each of us, when we're pursuing Christ, can speak to us individually about how we need to live and the decisions we need to make that are most honoring to him.

And he gives a caution in verse 16. "However, let us keep living by that same

standard to which we have attained." Well, who's the standard? The standard is Jesus Christ. Now, how do we live the standard that we don't have in our life? It means, that we live the standard by allowing Christ to live in and through us. It's having a resolute purity in our life. It's virtue. Its moral excellence. It's holiness.

It's a desire for Christ likeness. It's what Paul pens and Galatians 4:19, when he says, "I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." Now, let me tell you what I'm talking about when I talk about purity. Because oftentimes what people hear purity they think, okay, purity means I haven't engaged in that behavior. They think innocence.

Purity and innocence are two different things. Okay? The Bible says, "There is no one good, no, not one." The Bible says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." The Bible makes it clear that none of us was born pure. All of us were born in sin. As a result, we've demonstrated that in any number of ways. Okay? Just because you haven't engaged in something immoral, doesn't mean that you're pure in heart.

So often when we think about purity, we start thinking about behaviors and we try to become pure externally from the outside in. And so when a pastor talks about purity, here's what you begin to think. I'm not going to look at that anymore. I'm not going to touch that anymore. I'm not going to do that because oh, I'm sweating in church. That's not how you get pure. You don't get pure by changing behavior.

You get pure by letting God change your heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God Jesus soon." Now, think about this in your own life for a minute. When you're just thinking about, I mean, our behaviors will demonstrate what our heart

actually believes. So think about this. How's your tongue? How's your tongue? I mean, how do you speak? Is it full of grace and seasoned with salt so it will benefit everyone who listens?

Is it filled with the spirit? Because the Bible says, "For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." How are your eyes? What do you look at? What are you engaged with? Are there things that are pleasing to the Lord? Because the Bible says, "The eyes are the windows to your soul." How are your hands? What do you touch? Is Jesus pleased with where your hands go as you are? How are your feet? Where you visit, where do you go?

Is Jesus as excited to travel with you there as you are? How's your mind? What do you think about? What do you dwell on? Is Jesus as pleased with that as you are? Because see, as Christians, we know the mystery of the gospel is Christ in us, the hope of glory. So everything you look at, everything, you speak, everything you touch, every place you visit, everything you think about. You're inviting Jesus along for that journey.

The question is, is he is excited about it as you are? And if he's not, then here's what he wants to do. He wants to let his purity reign in your heart so that in all those areas things become different. Because the reality is you can try to change your tongue and you can try to change your hand. You can try to change your mind. You can try for the rest of your life, and it will not work.

But here in a moment, if Jesus Christ changes your heart, all those things begin

to change. And what it doesn't mean is once your heart is changed that, man, your speech will be perfect throughout all the time or your eyes will be perfect all the time. It doesn't mean that everything's going to go right, but it means that you will be progressively growing in all those areas in your life.

So here's the question. Last time it was, is Jesus first place in your life? Here's this question. Does Jesus have full reign in all the areas of your life? I mean, can Jesus Christ speak to you and say go here and do that or become this or become that where you would say, "Sure, Lord, just tell me the word and I'll do it?" See, that's what Paul was saying.

Paul was saying, because his calling to God was so powerful. That's how he wanted to live. He wanted to have resolute purity for the Lord. And we live in a society that says purity is like a bad thing. That if we live pure, we're missing out. The reality is when we live pure, we get the fullness of who God is in our life. No matter our age, no matter our gender, no matter where we are.

And the beautiful thing about purity is it's not something we attain ourselves. It's something that Christ gives us by his grace. And when we're living this way and when we have a renewed passion for Christ and we've released our past and we have this relentless pursuit and we're living resolutely pure for Jesus, guess what? We get to enjoy God in a way we've never enjoyed God before.

And guess what? We get to experience him in this world, as we yearn for his coming and we long for his appearing, that's how it happens. And so the way I wanted

to end today is a little different than how we normally end. I'm going to invite you just to stand to your feet at this time. And I think one of these messages requires just a time of prayer that we can do right by yourself, where you're at.

Because so often when you hear a message like this you can think to yourself, "Well, I'm going to leave here today. I'm going to go work on this stuff. I'm going to get this stuff right. Maybe there's this one thing." But we don't commit to the Lord the very thing that he showed us in our heart that we need to be. And so I just wanted to end by giving us a chance to pray.

And if you be comfortable, just kind of holding your hands out like this, just symbolically of what God is going to show you that you're are holding onto that you're going to release to him. If you're comfortable doing that, you can do that this morning. And let's just pray together. So Lord Jesus, we come before your throne.

And Lord, there's all different things that you're doing through your spirit this morning. Perhaps for some of you, you're here today, and what you're holding onto is this world and that you've never relinquished your life to Christ. And if that's you here this morning, here's what you're holding on to. You're on your dead life that's going absolutely nowhere.

And here's what God would ask you to do. God would ask you to admit to him this morning that you're a sinner, to believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins and rose from the dead. And to confess him as your personal Lord and savior. And that as you turn from your sin, he's going to give you his life. For some of you here

this morning, you love the Lord, but it's just gotten static and routine and you need a renewed passion in him.

And he's shown you something this morning about a way you can renew your passion and your relationship for him, perhaps in the way that you sing or the way you give or the way you pray or the way you attend church or some new area, a way with people, the way you evangelize, he's shown it to you.

And what you're saying to him now is, "Lord, I heard you this morning, it's this. And Lord, by faith, I want to believe you. Lord, help me to accomplish what you're showing me there." For some of you this morning, it's your past. You know that no matter what you do to move forward, you can't help but think and look at your past. And there's a specific area, for some of you need to forgive somebody.

For some, you need to release your past because it was so good and that you trust God in the present. For some, it was so bad, but you need to trust God in the present. You know what it is. And so you're telling the Lord this morning, "Lord, I know what it is in my past I'm holding on to, and right now, by faith, I'm releasing my past to you so that I can move forward."

For some of you that are here this morning, you love the Lord, but he is not first place in your life. There's either a sin there that's been going on for a long time you need to confess. Or for others of you, there's just a hindrance. It's not even sinful, but you know the Lord's been speaking to you about something that you've been unwilling to relinquish to him.

And what you're saying right now is "Lord, this is mine. This is what I've been holding onto. And Lord this morning, by faith, I relinquish this to you. Help me God, to live for you." And for some of you this morning, it's just to renew purity. You in your heart, those things that are immoral that God wants to change.

And for others of you, the reason you can't give God the entirety of your life is because there's some past sin that you're holding onto. And what you're going to say to the Lord this morning is "Lord, I want you to have full reign of every area of my life." And here's what you spoke to me about this morning. Lord, I confess that to you.

I give it to you and I receive your forgiveness. And Lord, all of us here, we're so thankful for you. We're so thankful for the love with which you have for us, your shed blood on Calvary, your resurrection from the dead and the life that we have in your name.

And Lord, as we sing in you about the victory we've already been given, and that we're going to experience. Lord, would you be high and lifted up in the way that we sing to you today. We give you all the praise, glory and honor in Jesus name. Amen. Can we give God some praise for who he is this morning?