



Message Transcript

For Christ's Sake

Jeff Schwarzentraub

Pastor Jeff:

Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise as we seek you today as a body of people believing that you are at work. And that every time your word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed, that you speak directly to us. And so our prayer this morning, as every morning is, speak Lord, for we are ready to hear. We want to hear what you have to say. We want to hear how you challenge us, admonish us, encourage us. Lord, you know everything about us and you want to speak to us through your word today.

And so now for all who have gathered who desire to hear the Lord Jesus Christ speak directly to you, who will believe what he says and who will by faith put into practice what he shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word, amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

Amen.

Today's message is for Christ's sake. Really, every message I preach is for Christ's sake. Really, all the things that we do in the church are for Christ's sake. Now, when you hear the words, for Christ's sake, we need to really redeem those words because sometimes they're used by our secular culture to say something pejorative or derogatory. But really, when it comes to the things of God, we're doing everything for

the sake of Jesus Christ. Really, everything the Bible wants us to do is to recognize that Jesus Christ is worthy of all your glory, honor, and praise. And for the sake of Christ, God wants you to live. The greatest peace, the greatest joy, the greatest hope in the world is through Jesus Christ and for Christ's sake.

Now, at the end of a calendar year, many people start thinking about the future and where they're going and what they're doing. And this is not a message of how to set new goals for the new year and how to be resolved or any of those things. This is really for you to think through not only today as we get ready to turn a page on a calendar year, but just every day. What does it look like for you to live for Christ's sake? Well, what in your life do you need to change or how do you need to live so that Jesus Christ gets more glory in and through you? If you've ever wanted to know how you can make that happen, no matter where you are in your journey, I believe that God has a word for you.

I'd encourage you today to open your Bibles up to the book of Philippians chapter three. Philippians chapter three. We're going to be in verses 12, 13 and 14. And while you're turning to Philippians 3, let me just really set up the text for you. This is one of my favorite books in the New Testament, Philippians. The Apostle Paul is really writing about the joy that we have in Christ. And he's writing to this church in Philippi and he's telling them even though things haven't gone well for him, even though he's in prison, even though some are preaching Christ from wrong motives, what does he care as long as Jesus is being preached? He's getting to witness to all the praetorian guard

and everyone else that he's in chains for Jesus. And he says, even if they kill me, what does that matter? "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

Then he begins in chapter two to talk about the humility of Christ and all that Christ endured. And how God wants us to work out Christ in and through our lives. That what God has worked in, He wants us to work out. He talks about his relationship with Timothy and Epaphroditus. And then he goes through his litany and resume of, if there's anybody that thinks that they could be religious enough without Christ, it would be me. And he goes through his resume and he says, "I count all of that garbage." Literally, he says, "It's excrement to the surpassing knowledge of knowing Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior." And then he gets into what he's going to talk about today before he gets to chapter four and talks about how we need to think about things.

And as we set up this text in Philippians chapter three verses 12, 13 and 14, I want you to think about how it is that you can live today and in the coming year for Christ's sake. Let me read these three verses, then we'll unpack them together. He says this, "Not that I have 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 lies behind 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." And there, nestled in those three verses, the Holy Spirit really begins to tell us how it is that we can live today and every day for the sake of Christ. How we can live for Christ's sake.

And here's why this text is so important. The Bible says that salvation is new

birth. That's simply the beginning. And the Bible makes clear that God so loved the world that he sent Jesus Christ, His only begotten son who put on flesh, who became incarnate flesh and became the God man. And even though the second person to the Trinity, Jesus, had existed for eternity about 2000 years ago, put on flesh for all eternity, he came and fulfilled the law. He came and did everything his dad required. He restored honor to his father. And at the end of his life, he laid down his life on the cross, showing the love and justice of God. The justice of God, that he was willing to pay for all of our sins, and the love of God which provided us a way into relationship with God.

Three days later, Jesus Christ rose from the dead, began to offer life to anybody who would repent of their sin. Meaning they would want to turn from their sin, their deadness, and turn by faith in the living God to Christ and have life in his name. That's the good news. We call that the gospel. And in the gospel, we call that new birth. That's just the beginning. And yet for many believers around the world, they think that's the end, "I got saved. What else is there?" Well, there's a whole bunch. There's a whole bunch. No matter where you are, there's more.

And this is why Paul writes this text because if there was anybody that had a way of saying, "I'm very well-educated. I've been the religious person, I've done it all. I'm of Jewish descent, I'm of the right tribe of Benjamin, of all the Pharisees, I'm like a Pharisee of Pharisee. When it comes to legalistic righteousness, I'm faultless. If there's anybody that can boast about their religious resume, it's me. And yet I consider it all dung. I consider it all excrement to the surpassing knowledge of knowing Jesus Christ,

my Lord. And I want to know what his sufferings were like and I want to participate with Christ and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead when I can meet Jesus."

And then he writes this and he says, "For Christ's sake," and he's going to highlight four areas this morning that we need to grow in for the sake of Jesus Christ. And the first is this, "For Christ's sake, shed your passivity and initiate pursuit. For Christ's sake, shed your passivity and initiate pursuit." Now notice what he says, "Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect." If there's anybody in the history of the church who could have touted their resume and said, "I've done a pretty good job," it would be the Apostle Paul. Two-thirds of the New Testament was written by the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Started churches from scratch, was beat, was arrested. Everything we read about him, that's a model as to what we might want to look at. And here's what he says, "I haven't got there. I haven't attained it. I'm not perfect already. I'm not there."

Now, this should give us great comfort as believers in Jesus Christ. If the Apostle Paul said, "I haven't arrived," what does that mean for me and you? We ain't there either. It means this, no matter where you are on your journey with Christ Jesus, there's more. There's more. You ever seen those infomercial ads, "But wait, there's more"? That's what the Apostle Paul is saying. No matter how much you've experienced, wait, there's more. And he tells us, "For Christ's sake, to shed your passivity and initiate pursuit." Notice what he says, "Not that I've obtained it already or already become perfect. But what do I do? I press on." That means, I pursue, "I press

on that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus."

That sounds tongue twister-ish a little bit. It means, I want to grasp everything that Jesus Christ grasped for me. Well, what did Jesus Christ grasp for Paul? Or what did Jesus Christ grasp for us? Jesus Christ left heaven for you. For every single believer, here's what he would say, "You did not choose me," Jesus said, "I chose you and appointed you to go bear fruit." It means Jesus left heaven for you. He fulfilled the law for you. He came and died for you. He rose from the dead for you. He sent the Holy Spirit for you. He's the one through the Holy Spirit who gifted you. He's given you every single thing you need for life and godliness. Paul says, "I've got it all. Jesus has all of me. I just want to grab all of him."

What he was saying is, God's got all of me. He's taken all of me. I want take everything that God has for me. I don't want to sit back. I don't want to be passive. And here's the problem in the church, specifically in America, many times we think, "If God wants to grow me, He'll grow me. I'm growing. Don't push me. Don't tell me what I need to do. I'm good. I'm okay. If God wants to change that, He'll change that." Have you ever been in a conversation with somebody where you share the word with them and you're like, "Well, this is what the Bible says," and they say something like this, "Yeah, maybe, but I'm just not convicted about that yet"? Well, who cares if you're convicted about it, it's what Jesus says.

We tend to have a very passive approach to our sanctification. And regardless of your view of sanctification, sanctification is the process of going from new birth to glorification. It's that period in between where we're growing in holiness and

righteousness. And here's what the Bible teaches, that the Holy Spirit initiates, but you must cooperate. He initiates, but you must participate. The Holy Spirit's main ministry is to make Jesus Christ look good. That's what he's always doing. His ministry on the earth was to glorify the Son, bring adoration to the Son so the Father would be glorified. That's still his mission. And the gospel is Christ in you, the hope of glory. So what is the Holy Spirit's job in you? To make Jesus look really good coming out of you.

So the Holy Spirit is always at work prompting, convicting, changing, tweaking, moving, so that he wants us to step here, he wants us to move there, he wants us to stop that. He initiates, but guess what? You must cooperate. You must participate with him. And many of us in the church, we're very passive. We're very passive, like, "Well, I'm doing enough. I feel like I'm doing the things that he needs me to do and I'm pretty good with that." And the reason that we're passive is because it's part of our sinful DNA. You track it all the way back to Adam in the garden when God gave him a command to bring the word to his wife and he failed. He let the enemy, through a serpent, talk to his wife who chose wrongly because Adam didn't stand up and say, "This is what God says." He didn't follow the prompting, he didn't follow the command.

And passivity is in the heart of all of us. We want everyone else to take care of us. For those of us that are married, we hope our marriages takes care of itself, "It's my spouse's job to make it good. It's our kid's job to make it good." Kids, "It's my parents' job to make it good." If I work, it's my boss's job to make it good. If I'm the boss, it's my employees' job to make it good. We like to relinquish ourself to passivity. And here's how you know, because we like things that are certain and unchanging.

That's the way God made us.

Exhibit A. For those of you that come to BRAVE, you're probably sitting in about the same seat you sit every single week. I know this because on Christmas Eve, there were a couple of you mad because somebody took your row, "Don't they know this is my row?" Because we like comfort. We like certainty. So to change the routine and not be passive and actually pursue the Lord causes a change of uncertainty in our life. But this is what God wants us to do. If you want to grow in Christ, you got to kick passivity to the curb and you got to participate and cooperate with the Holy Spirit. You have to work out what he's working in. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, that's what God wants.

And the way we do that is for the sake of Christ and for the sake of the gospel. Jesus Christ died on the cross. He rose from the dead. There's no greater news on the planet. And you are left here as his witness, as his ambassador, so that Jesus Christ can work in and through you so people can see whether you're a man, woman, boy or girl, what it looks like to glorify God as a human being. That's your role and you need to exhaust yourself in that role. If you want to grow in Christ, that's how you exhaust yourself. That's how you grow. That's what you do.

Listen to the Apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians chapter nine, starting in verse 23, here's what he says. He says, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel." In other words, I do all this for the sake of Christ. How many of us could say that about our lives, "Everything I'm doing, I'm doing for the sake of Christ"? That's what Paul was

trying to say. Certainly he wasn't perfect. He just told you he wasn't. He hadn't arrived, but that's what he was trying to do, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel so that I may become a fellow partaker in it."

Then he goes through this whole sporting analogy, "Do you not know that all who run in a race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the game exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." There's people that give so much dedication to sport, to finances, to future, to goals, for things that are only temporary here. We're serving a God for eternal rewards. How much more important is that? Therefore, Paul says, "I run in such a way as not without aim. I box in such a way as not beating the air," but what? "I discipline my body and I make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

You study the life of Paul, there's no passivity in this life. Here's what you see in the life of the Apostle Paul, "I'm going after Jesus with everything and here's what's going to happen to me, riots, beatings, and persecutions. So long as I get to preach, I don't care if I'm in prison and I don't care if I'm in the streets. What difference does it make as long as Jesus Christ is glorified in my life? And if they kill me, whatever. For me to live is Christ, to die is gain. That's the goal of my faith. You're just getting me to my goal quicker. Everything I'm doing is for Christ."

Think about your life. This is a rhetorical question. How much of your life is for the sake of Christ? Is your marriage for the sake of Christ? Is your singleness for the sake of Christ? Is your family for the sake of Christ? Is your participation in church for the

sake of Christ? Is your gospel proclamation and being intentional about sharing with the lost for the sake of Christ? You want to grow in 2024? You want to grow today and any other day? Shed your passivity and initiate pursuit.

I heard this quote recently from the late, great Adrian Rogers who preached in the last generation. Here's what he said. He said, "We ought to be living as if Jesus died yesterday, rose this morning, and is coming back this afternoon." That's the nutshell of all of this. If we really lived like that, we might change our ways a little bit and we might see growth in our life. So for Christ's sake, shed your passivity and initiate pursuit. That's what Christ would have. The very things he's laid hold of in your life. Your eternal salvation's secure, your gifting is ... it's all there. Go grab it. Go take it. It's all yours for the taking. Pursue Jesus, there's a great return on investment. For Christ's sake, shed your passivity and initiate pursuit.

Number two is this, "For Christ's sake, stop your fascination with the past. For Christ's sake, stop your fascination with the past." Now, here's what he says. Here's what he says. He says this, he's like, "I want to lay hold of that for which also was laid hold by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it." He says it again, "I haven't got it all yet. There's more I can grow in Christ. But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind."

Stop your fascination with the past. There are so many people that don't grow in Christ because they are anchored to the past. They cannot move forward, they're

here. For some people it's because it's the good old days. When you hear people talk, "Oh, I remember back when I was growing up." My kids hear me talk that way sometimes. "I remember what it was like back then. I remember, oh, it was so good back then. Our country was so different back then. Church was so different back then. If we could only go backwards." You can't go backwards. And God did not put you on this earth to rewind a clock to go backwards. Some people read the Bible, "If only we lived in the first century. If only we had been with Jesus, it would be so much better." We're anchored back there. It's the good old days, "Remember how good it used to be? Don't you wish it could be like that?"

If you live like that, here's what you're saying, today is as bad as it's ever going to get and tomorrow might get worse. Imagine if I told my wife, "Hey, listen, we've had our best days. There'll never be any better than they used to be. From now on, it's just, meh." No way. There's only two things you can do from the past. Two things you can do. One, you can celebrate it. And two is, you can learn from it. And so when we reflect on the past, we can celebrate. Look at all that God's done, look at what He's done in and through us. Look at what He's done in and through our church. Look at what He's done in and through our culture. Look at what He did in a dark time. Look at that. Celebrate God, or we can learn from it.

If you've lived as long as I have, you have a lot of should have, would have, could have in your life. You have a lot of things you can learn from and that's all you can do. You cannot go backwards. God is not trying to take you backwards. Even the Back to the Bible movement, which I'm 100% for, Back to the Bible. I'm 100% for every word

being true in the Bible. If you go back to the Bible, you're going to understand that Jesus Christ is Lord and he's going to point you forward to the Kingdom of God. He's going to go set you on missions in the future.

And here's another reason why people have a hard time. For some of you in your past, there are things either before you came to Christ or even after you came to Christ of should have, would have, could have, that you live with guilt, doubt, shame and fear. And you're so anchored to the past that, "I could never move forward because look at what I did." Let me tell you something. If you blew it back here, you can't fix it back here. The reason Jesus died is because he knew you were going to blow it. You can't change the past. You can repent of it, you can confess it, you can forsake it, but you cannot change it.

Now, in our psychological world, we like to use terms like this, "Some of you just need to forgive yourself." The problem I have with that is that the Bible says that there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. And the Bible also says that the only blood that is possible to forgive sin is Jesus Christ's blood. If you could forgive yourself, Jesus Christ died on the cross for nothing. You cannot forgive yourself. What people are trying to say is, "Would you please receive the fullness of Jesus Christ's forgiveness over all your doubt, shame and guilt?" Some of you live 5, 10, 15, 20 years ago, "I should have known better. If only I wouldn't have done this. My life's over now," then you know nothing about the blood. The blood of Jesus cleanses you from all unrighteousness. He forgives all your sins. He lets you be freed up so that you don't have to wallow in your past.

And isn't that good news? Because for so many of us, "Well, I'm born-again, but I should have known better. My first marriage. I should have known better in that dating relationship. I could have done different at my first job. I could have done different with my finances." Friends, everybody does stupid things. It's called sin. It's why Jesus Christ died on the cross. You're not immune. Stop having your fascination with the past. Some people are like, "Man, if I would have lived in John Wesley's generation or Charles Spurgeon's generation ..." You don't want to say that because God ordained this time and this season and this life for you. Quit wishing you were somewhere else, when God said, "This is where I placed you. Your best days are now."

That's what he was saying. Stop the fascination with the past. Stop it. It's not the good old days and it's not the shame, remorse, guilt and doubt days. Paul looked back on his life and when he would look back on his life, he would say things like this, "Can't believe God could use someone like me. Of all the sinners out there, I'm the worst. I was abusing the church of Jesus Christ. I was dragging people off to be persecuted and killed. And if God can use me, here's what I know, He can use you. Who else? Why would God pick me? He picked me because I'm one of the shameful ones in the world. And he picked me so I could confound the wise." Paul would look back and give God glory for all that He did.

It's okay to look back as stones of remembrance. It's okay to look back at all that God's done. It's okay to look back at 2023 and say this because I mean this with all sincerity. Friends, at Brave Church, we started another campus in Colorado Springs

this year. Praise the Lord. Can we give God praise for what He's starting on? We love you guys. We see you.

We started Brave Academy with 34 students and about 14 employees. It's amazing. By God's grace, in 2024, we'll have a middle school and a high school too. We'll see. We can look back and we can celebrate those things. We can tell God, "It's you and you're great and you're good." There's nothing wrong with that. But don't live here. Don't live here. Do you know why? Because that's not where you're at. Your past is completely forgiven. Your future is completely secure. And guess where God has you, right here in the present to give Him the most glory you can. And if you can't unhinge from the past, you can't enjoy God now. God did not put you on this earth as a believer who's been forgiven to wallow in stuff that's already been forgiven. And some of you needed to hear that today. Don't look back. Don't go back.

Throughout the Bible you see this theme all over the place. In Genesis chapter 19, God's going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for their gross sin. God tells Lot to get his family out of Sodom and Gomorrah and they start running away from the city as God's raining down fire on the city and tells them, "Don't look back." They're all running and Lot's wife turned back and turned into a pillar of salt. Don't look back.

Or how about Israel? Listen, listen, listen. For 400 years, I'm 53, 400 years, all they did was complain that they were in slavery, "God, where are you? This is so hard. We hate it here. Deliver us. Deliver us. Deliver us." God sends Moses as His servant, as a deliverer, performs 10 massive plagues. They get delivered and the final blow is, God parts the Red Sea, lets all of Israel through and destroys all of Egypt. They start

singing praise songs on the beach as all the dead bodies of the Egyptians are floating. And yet what happens? Three days later, "Oh, I miss Egypt. They had leeks and garlic. Who led us out here? Moses, we hate you." 400 years they've been complaining, what do they do? They look back.

That's what we do. It's in human nature to look back and think it was better. Singles, listen to me. You know what I'm talking about. God shows you the person you're dating is not the person. You break up with them and you go three months without anybody and you start thinking, "Maybe I need to go back. It was better than nothing." No, it wasn't. Devil paints a picture that it was better than what you thought it was. You can't go dip your toe in the same stream again where it was. Everything's dynamic. Everything's moving forward. Quit looking backward. God is on the move going forward. Walk with God. God's not walking backward. He's walking forward right into the Kingdom. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

So stop your fascination with the past. Celebrate it. Learn from it. Grow from it. Praise God, it's completely forgiven.

Who here does not have skeletons in their closet? Who here does not have things that you're like, "I'm glad nobody knows that"? Who? We all do because we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It doesn't mean we press them down. It

doesn't mean we fake it. It means we go before the Lord and we confess it. We repent. Where we can make amends, we make amends. And then guess what we do? We move on and we don't stay anchored to the past. And there's too many people in the body of Christ that are still anchored to the past, falsely thinking they can change it. You can change nothing. Why waste your time there? Why not move forward for what God has you to do? Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

So for Christ's sake, shed your passivity and initiate pursuit. And for Christ's sake, stop your fascination with the past. Learn from it, celebrate it, grow from it, and turn the page.

Then number three says, "For Christ's sake, stretch your faith with new challenges. Stretch your faith with new challenges." I love what Paul says. He makes a great preacher. He says this, he says, "Brethren, I did not consider myself of having laid hold of it. But one thing I do," and then he gives two points. Don't you love that? Just like any good preacher would do, "One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead." Why is that one point? Because they both go hand in glove. It's not just about leaving your past. It's not just about, "Okay, I'm forgiven." It's about moving forward. It's about taking steps of faith. It's about stretching towards the finish line.

This is a picture of the tape at the end of a race where the runner is stretched out saying, "I'm going for it. Until I meet Jesus Christ face to face, I want to live my life for Christ's sake. I want to live my life for the sake of the gospel. I want to live my life for everything Jesus deems important until I meet him face to face. I want to meet him as I'm running full speed into him." That's what Paul is saying. So forgetting what was behind and straining towards what is ahead means for Christ's sake, stretch your faith with new challenges.

We've already been over some of this already. The reason it's tough to take new challenges is we like comfort. We like certainty. We like knowing how things work. Here's the problem. Listen, listen, listen. Whatever spiritual disciplines you've developed up until now, if that's the only ones that you have, instead of being a groove, it will become a rut. You'll dig in deeper, you'll dig in deeper, you'll dig in and you'll wonder, "How come I'm not growing?" Because you got to stretch new limits. You got to take on new disciplines. It's when you take on some new initiatives and take on some new disciplines where you have to trust God in a way you haven't had to trust God before. That's how you grow. You can't grow in Christ if you're not trusting Christ for new things.

And it's different for each and every one of us here. I don't know what the next step for you looks like. We always say the hardest step of faith to take is the next one. What's it look like for you? Maybe for you, it's prayer. Maybe you've never prayed out loud in a group before and that scares you to death. It's okay. Come to BRAVE, we'll teach you how. We might not even teach you, we might just ask you to do it. Maybe

it's learning to pray with more intentionality for others. Maybe it's during the 21 days of prayer and fasting that you show up every Monday through Friday at 6:30 to 7:30 to pray with the group. Maybe it's every Saturday morning at 8:00 for an hour to pray with the group. Maybe it's intentionally praying every single day. Maybe it's starting a devotional time that you don't have. Maybe it's starting a five-minute devotional time every day to seek the Lord before you roll out of bed.

That doesn't sound like a lot. It is a lot if you don't have five minutes that you're spending now. It's not about how you compare yourself to somebody else. Or, what about financially? I remember when I first started tithing, I've told you these stories, "10% of my net? How am I ever going to afford to pay bills?" Well, if you give it to the Lord, then you got to trust Him in a new way. For those of you that tithe, you know it's not that big of a deal. As a matter of fact, you wouldn't stop because you've seen God provide in all sorts of different ways and it's just a spiritual discipline that you do. But maybe for you it's, how do I give over and above that? What's it look like for me to be even more generous? And how would the Lord have me steward my resources in a way where I really have to trust Him even more than the groove or the rut that I'm getting into?"

How do you disturb what's going on? How do you make things different? And we don't like that, but I'm telling you, it's in that uncertainty and it's in that uncomfortability, that's where all the growth in Jesus Christ happens. And you got to decide where that is because the Lord will start prompting you. He'll show you, "Hey, this year, here's

how I want you to give." Or how about for some of you, you come to BRAVE for a long time. You like the church, you love it, you come on a regular basis, but perhaps you've never lifted a finger to serve anywhere and you just think that all the ministries are for you. And maybe the Lord prompts you to say, "Hey, you have gifts and you can serve and you can give more generously with your time." And maybe that's an uncomfortability where you start giving five or 10 hours a week to serve your local church in some way where the Lord could use you.

Maybe you've never shared your faith before. Maybe you've never even shared the gospel with a non-believer. Maybe this year is your year to do that. You know how you learn to share your faith? You share your faith. You know how you learn to worship? You worship. You know how you learn to teach the Bible? You teach the Bible. There's no natural gifting where you just wake up someday and be like, "I know how to do everything in the Christian ..." It doesn't happen that way. You have to decide and take steps of faith.

And here's, really, four stages that happen when you do. You make a decision and you commit to it, "This is what I'm going to do. This is how I'm going to give financially. This is how I'm going to serve, or this is how I'm going to share my faith, or this is how I'm going to pray." Whatever it is. When you decide and you take steps to do that, everything will go crazy. It'll grow your faith. For those of you that have never tithe before, as soon as you tithe, you will freak out the first time you do. "Well, what am I ... Ah." First time you decide to lead a cadre? "Well, how come nobody's showing up on time and how come nobody takes this as serious as I do?" First time you're

serving kids, I promise you you'll say that. Or you share your faith. First time I ever shared my faith, I was stumbling over my words. I was nervous. I was like, "I'm going to blow this for him and for his eternity and I'm scared to death."

Whatever it is, is going to cause you uncomfortability where it has to grow your faith and your dependence upon the Lord. And when you do that, then you begin to learn the ways of God. This is how God operates. I see other scriptures that support this. And then finally, when you see God at work, it gives you this confidence like, that really does work. And now you're ready to go around the circle again and decide something different.

Now let me be clear to you, whatever the Lord shows you, some of you overachievers out here, don't pick 18 things in 2024 you're going to change. Pick one. Just pick one. Well, that doesn't sound like a lot. It is a lot if you do it well. Just pick one. Is it your area of generosity? Is your area of service? Is it your area of devotion time with the Lord? What is it? Just pick one and just take a step of faith where the Lord prompts you and trust Him to show up in it. And as you gain confidence in that, then take the next one. As you get confidence in that, take the next one. Don't overpromise and under-deliver. Just commit to what the Lord shows you and say, "Okay, we're going to try this. We're going to go for it and see what the Lord does." That's how growth happens and that's what God has for your life and that's what He wants you to do. And you can upset the apple cart by taking greater steps of faith.

I remember when Kim and I were making the decision to move out here and stretch our faith. We had waited for about seven years in our itinerant ministry where

now we had money coming in and now we had staff coming in and now we had two different radio programs and books were getting written. Everything was finally established where we weren't wondering how we were going to pay for food or any of that kind of stuff. And that was about the time the Lord started prompting me, "It's time to move and plant a church." And we began to talk about it, like, "How's this going to work? We don't know anybody." But I knew in my gut I'd seen God take me around that wheel so many times, we got to go. And we were having very candid conversations about, where's the money going to come from? Where are we going to find people? Where are we going to find a building? Any of that. And the answer was always the same, "I don't know, but God does. So let's go."

And I remember right before we were ready to leave Central Illinois to move out to Colorado, my wife asked me, I think it was on a Monday or something like that, "So what we're going to do is just take a bed and some furniture and we'll get an apartment. And if this thing doesn't work out four or five months from now, we'll just move back here, right?" And I remember thinking, "Ugh, no. We're going to burn the bridge." So I called the moving company and I said, "Can you move us this week?" And they said, "The only day we have open is Thursday." I said, "Come pack us." So Thursday, there was nothing left in our house. And I looked at my wife and said, "We're never coming back. We're going. And if this doesn't work out, then there's something else because God's got to show us what it is."

That's what it looks like to take a step of faith. And my wife took a step of faith

because she followed and she was totally supportive the whole time too. But that's what it looks like. And uncomfortable. Come to a city where you don't know anybody and the only person you know is unsaved and ask, "Hey, how can we meet people and who are we going to find? We don't have a building. We don't have a website. We don't have money. We don't have a trailer. We don't have sound. Other than that, we are so set to do church." But it grows your faith. And once you've done that or you've seen that and then you see God provide a building and then another building and then another building and then a school, and now it's like, okay, what next, God? How do we stay on the edge so we don't get comfortable with you?

I don't care whether the church is 50 people, 500 people, 5,000 people, 50,000 people, the moment you get to a place where you tell the Lord, "We're good. We feel pretty good about this. We're fine. We're just going to manage it," you lose everything that God has for you. And as long as I'm pastor of this church and as long as I can teach you the Word of God, I want all of us to continue to step on the faith pedal in some way every single day. Where are you leaning on the Lord? What are you trusting Him for? What are you believing Him for? What are the things He's shown you in His word that He wants you to trust Him with? That's what God wants. He wants to grow your confidence in Him so you can continue to choose things for Him so you can grow your faith and continue to learn the ways of God. So stretch your faith this year. Press on.

Let me just tell you one thing too, before we move on to the next point. Do you know your best days as a Christian? Do you know your best days are always ahead of

you? No matter what happens today, no matter how good today is, your best day is always ahead of you. Because the best day you'll ever have in your entire life is meeting Jesus Christ face to face, being transformed into his glorious image, presented faultless before the Father, hearing, "Well done, good and faithful servant," with exceedingly great joy in heaven. That day is better than any day you have on your calendar. And that day's coming.

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

It's coming. And I've been crystal clear from this pulpit and told you exactly when that's going to happen, when the Bible says it's going to happen. Soon. So that's how we need to live. It doesn't matter whether he comes back in your lifetime or not. What difference does it make? You get one life to live. Why wouldn't you just live as if he's going to? Why wouldn't you live as if it's that important to you? Why wouldn't you live as if your generation's the generation, we're going to do our best to evangelize the whole world. The gospel's not about moralizing the planet, it's about evangelizing the planet. We're proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And oh, by the way, I better say one more thing because there's like three of you in here that don't know this. Next year's an election year. Forgetting what's behind and yearning for what's ahead is not, "Who's going to get elected." I'm involved in the political process. You should be involved in the political process. As Christians, we

should be outspoken about all those things. But that is not the main thing we should be outspoken about. The main thing we should be outspoken about is Jesus Christ, him crucified and resurrected and the need to repent and believe in him. That's what we're turning the page on. That's what we're looking forward to. That's where we're going.

And the world, yes, the world needs new politicians on both sides of the aisle, frankly. But what the world needs more than anything is Jesus. We have the answer for the world. And yet too often, we shut our mouths because we're so fearful about what's going to happen in the Ukraine and Russia and China and Taiwan and Israel and Iraq and United States and southern border crossings, and all these different things and our woke colleges. And is all that true? Yes. And here's the truth, Jesus Christ is still Lord and the gospel still works. Preach the gospel. Amen? That's the point.

So as we look forward to closing the door on 2023, we look forward to all that God might have for our church, for our city. Last time I looked, there's probably about two million people in our city that if the world ended today would spend a Christ-less eternity. And God has positioned our church in this city for His glory so that people could hear and see what it looks like to have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen?

Congregation:

Amen.

Pastor Jeff:

So stretch your faith this year with new challenges, forgetting what is behind and

straining towards what lies ahead.

Then he gives us the fourth point. He says, "For Christ's sake, set your goal to fulfill Christ's calling. For Christ's sake, set your goal to fulfill Christ's calling." He says, "I press on toward the goal." Well, Paul, what's the goal? What's the goal? I'm a goal setter. There's nothing wrong with goal setting so long as you hold your goals like this with open hands and so long as they're for the glory of God. And whether you attain them or not, so be it.

What's the goal, Paul? Here's the goal, "I press on for the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Jesus is the one who made me aware of himself. He's the one who saved me by grace through faith. He's the one who died on the cross. He's the one who rose from the dead. He's the one who ascended. He's the one who's gifted me. He's the one who's coming back to rule as king and Lord overall. And my goal is to make sure that when he arrives, I've exhausted myself with every fiber I have, every gift that I have, every good thing in my life that I have, so that he could become more famous and more honored and more glorified.

That's what it means. That's the goal of my faith. That's the goal of your faith. And if it's not the goal of your faith, Christianity can become one of the most boring religions in the world. If Christianity is just about moralizing and being a good person, there's a lot of people out there that are moral, good people that are going to bust hell wide open if they don't repent and believe Jesus Christ is the Lord. It's not about being good. It's about being alive because you were once dead and it's about sharing the life of Christ with others. It's about yearning for the day we see Jesus Christ face to face.

Does that mean we don't enjoy anything in life? No. Every blessing that God gives in this life, whether it's marriage, whether it's kids, whether it's enjoyment of sports or leisure activity, that's all to be enjoyed for the glory of God. Food, drink, all to be enjoyed for the glory of God. But hold it open-handedly. Those things just pass through. What we hold onto is the fact that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. And that is not a passing truth. That is an eternal truth that we will anchor ourselves to until we see Him face to face. That's what it's about. And for billions and billions and however long years, however long eternity is and as long as we can make eternity the day after that, it's just getting started, that's how long eternity is, that's what life's about.

So he says this, he says, "For Christ's sake, set your goal to fulfill Christ's calling." Nothing wrong with goals. Nothing wrong with having a goal to become something in life or graduating with a certain degree or helping people in a certain way, so long as your primary goal is glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ with everything you have. And if in glorifying the Lord Jesus with everything you have He has you doing a lot of different things because your uniqueness, to God be the glory. And if that gets interrupted in the way, that's okay. Paul's goal was to preach the gospel around the world, "You beat me, I'm still going to preach. You kill me, I've arrived. I don't care what you do, my goal doesn't change." That's what our goals need to be too.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, and I love this, "My prayer is that when I die, all of hell rejoices that I'm out of the fight." May that be all of our prayers. The goal is meeting

Christ and knowing Christ and knowing that we've exhausted ourselves for Christ. And the reason some of us don't live there is not because you can't and not because you don't want to, but for some of you, you're too passive. You wallow too much in the past and you don't realize that you have everything you need to have your past forgiven and your future secure. So live in the present with intensity and everything that you have for Jesus.

Friends, I want to tell you something about the gospel. You may know this truth. We sing, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." That's great theology. Christ, for believers, here's what you need to know, Christ has forgiven all your sin. All of it.

I just want to read you a couple verses. I know there's some that are still here today, saying, "I'd love to move on, but the church could never use a person like me because I'm a miserable sinner." That's all that God's ever used in the history of the church because there's nobody else to choose from. The Bible says in 1 John 1, 8 and 9, "If we say we have no sins, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The book of Hebrews chapter eight and verse 12 says, "For I will be merciful to their iniquities and I will remember their sins no more."

How come it is that the devil's always bringing up your sins, but God's not? It doesn't mean God has amnesia like he doesn't remember what you did. It just means, "I'm not bringing it up anymore because it's under the blood of Christ and it's forgiven. So why do you keep thinking about it?" Or how about in Micah, the Old Testament

prophet Micah, chapter seven verses 18 and 19, "Who is a God like you who pardons iniquity?" What God does that? "And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of his possession? He does not retain his anger forever because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. Yes, you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

Isn't it good to know that all your sin is forgiven? Or how about this one we're going to sing about in a minute? Psalm 103 verse 12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

I'm just here to tell you that the beauty of the gospel is not, you were a good person and God made you better, or you were a bad person and God made you good. The beauty of the gospel is, you were dead and God made you alive. And he's not holding your sin against you. He took it as far as the east is from the west. He's buried it in the deepest sea. He's forgotten about it. He's not going to bring it up anymore. He's cleansed you. He's washed you. You're free to serve Him with everything you have. Wait, whoa, whoa. What's holding you back? That's the gospel. And the gospel we proclaim is not, you're a bad person and need to get good. The gospel we proclaim is not that you're a good person and need to get better. The gospel we proclaim is, you're dead and you need to repent and come alive in Christ. Exchange your dead sin for the life of Christ. Come and get it. And if you have it, live it, share it.

I'll just close by saying what we've been saying all along, for Christ's sake. For Christ's sake, shed your passivity and initiate pursuit. Go after Christ with all you have.

For Christ's sake, stop your fascination with the past. It's forgiven, it's washed, it's cleansed, it's done. Celebrate it, learn from it, and move on. For Christ's sake, stretch your faith with new challenges. What would the Lord have you do in 2023? What would be a step of faith for you? It's not a comparative step. You don't need to see what other people are doing and try to do what they do because whatever the step of faith is for you, that's a big step. You do what God shows you.

And then number four, for Christ's sake, set your goal to fulfill Christ's calling. You and I don't know what a day is going to bring forth. We just don't. We don't know if we're going to make it to the new year or not. We don't know. There's no guarantee. Say, "Oh, Pastor Jeff, that's just hours away." There's no guarantee. You get a one-day contract with life. That's all you get. So why wouldn't you put these things into practice now for Christ's sake?

The way we're going to end today is by taking communion. Communion reminds us with the elements that it's all about Christ and his sake. Communion reminds us, it's about his body and his blood. It's not about your good works. It's not about what you did to earn God's favor. It's about what he did to show you how good he is in your life. So as we sing this song and as we conclude with this today, I want you to hold those elements in your hand and just look at them and think about all that Christ did for you, all that he's forgiven in your life. And if you're dealing with guilt and shame and remorse and doubt, would you leave it at the foot of the cross? Because Jesus said this meal's for anybody, anywhere, at any time, who's repented of their sin and trusted Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Savior.

You can prepare yourself in any way that you want. Whether it's kneeling, sitting, standing, as you hear this song sung over you. Let me pray for you this morning. Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise for who you are. And Lord, we ask in this moment as we sing about Your goodness to us in the gospel, Lord, that we prepare our hearts thinking about all that you've forgiven. That we are new and for your sake, Jesus, we can walk in you.

If you've never trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, you can pray something like this. Dear Jesus, I know I'm a sinner and I know I don't have a relationship with you. Lord, I'm asking you right now to forgive my sins. I want to turn away from my sin and I want to turn to you. Give me your life. Come into my life. Make me new. And Lord, for those of us who are here, refresh us all over again today, letting us know how special we are and how unique we are to you and how you put us here as your witnesses and your ambassadors in this season for your glory. We give you all the praise in Jesus' name. Amen.