

Joy in Finishing Well

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[0 : 00] How we doing? Yeah? Hello? What a week.

We having some fun yet? Yeah? What a morning.

We're in a battle. And our Lord Jesus Christ is on His throne. He is not moved.

He is not swayed. He is doing as He pleases. So nothing's really changed.

Overall. Well, let's get to something more important than the things that happened this week.

[1 : 04] Take out your Bibles with me, please, and turn to Philippians chapter 3. We continue to hear Paul's testimony.

Paul is giving witness to his conversion, his transformation, what changed him.

And in his radical reorientation of life. He was fervently, zealously going one direction.

And in a moment, he was arrested, transformed, changed 180 degrees to become a zealot in the opposite direction.

And we hear this testimony of Paul in Philippians 3. And remember, he is doing this from a prison cell.

[2 : 09] He's not free. He's not able to go anywhere that he wants. He is being held. And this is after 27 years of that encounter that changed his life forever.

27 years that he continues to have passion and pursuit of Christ. And speak of joy. Joy.

In his Lord. So we want to read from Philippians 3. We're going to read from verse 7 through 16.

We'll be focusing on verses 12 to 16.

But we want to remember the context. So if you're able, please stand as I read from God's word.

Philippians 3, beginning of verse 7.

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[3 : 30] I'm not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law. But that which comes through faith of Christ. The righteousness from God that depends on faith.

That I may know him and the power of his resurrection. And may share in his sufferings. Becoming like him or being conformed to him in his death.

So that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have become perfect.

But I press on to make it my own. Because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.

But one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal.

[4 : 39] For the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way.

And if in anything you think otherwise. God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have obtained.

So reads his word. Let us pray for understanding. Father we pray again that you would come to us through your word. Lord we ask you Lord that you would send your spirit to us.

To enlighten the word. To take the word from the page. And put it into our heart. To transform our mind. Revive our soul.

Help us to grasp Paul's passion. Help us to grasp what motivates him. What has taken hold of him.

[5 : 39] And what it is that he wants to so zealously take hold of himself. Take these words today oh father.

Into our distracted hearts. Especially father would you lift up and encourage hearts that are struggling. That are downcast.

That are faint. That father we might see Jesus in this and be lifted up. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Please be seated. So it was the first and only half marathon I ever ran.

Well to be honest it wasn't even a half marathon. It was only 12 miles. I'd never run more than five miles before. But my wife or soon to be wife.

[6 : 46] At that time. Challenged me. To run. She had been running marathons. Beta breakers. All that kind of.

Stuff. Back in her day. What? Way back. Oh. No. Back. Whatever. That was my day too.

So. So. I was attending a college in San Francisco. Simpson College. And she was the dean of women there.

And I was always in trouble and in the dean's office. And that's how we met. So. She challenged this. And so. So the race. Or not race.

But the run was. Through the last part of the panhandle in San Francisco. Then on to the beach. Four miles along the beach. And then. Four miles around.

[7 : 45] Lake Merced. So it's 12 miles altogether. So. The first four miles were great. You know. I'd done that before. Piece of cake. Got out to the beach. I'm looking forward to that.

Somewhere in the beach time. I hit a wall. I finally understood what runners talk about. Hitting the wall. Now. Real runners don't hit that. Until they're like. 20 miles or something like that.

But. Four or five. That was about my limit. Hit the wall. The beach was a long stretch. It was an endless stretch.

It was a monotonous stretch. It was the same view. All the way along. You could not see the end. Of this beach. And so. The questions began to come. Why? What am I doing?

[8 : 43] What have I gotten myself into? Two. This is hard. I remember. All I wanted to do. Was stop.

Quit. So how do you keep going? In the middle of the run. When it is long.

And hard. And monotonous. And. You can't see the end. And all you want to do. Is. Stop. Just take a break.

What kept me going then? I was following Delinda. I had my eyes on her. I couldn't let her outrun me.

I wanted to do what she had done. That's what kept me going. And once you got past.

[9 : 45] For me. In that particular experience. Once I got through that wall. Through that four miles of ongoing. The last four miles were. I got a rush.

It was like. Whew. You could see the end. You know. Okay. Now we're in the bottom. Bottom of the inning here. And we're going. And I swear. I know I broke the four minute mile.

In the last. Because. Not only did I get strength. And pass Delinda. But. Then me and my buddy. Who was also running.

Were determined. Not to finish second. After all of this time. And so as I got closer to the end. We just started sprinting. Sprinting. Sprinting. Sprinting. I'm sure I won. But I don't remember that.

My point is. How do you keep going. In the long run. When you're in that middle part. When you hit the wall.

[10 : 48] See Paul compares. The Christian life to a race. Striving for the prize. Keeping the eye. On the end. Line. What is it that motivates us to go.

Because the Christian life. Can certainly feel the same way. It can feel like a long haul. It can be hard. We can lose motivation. We can get discouraged.

We can feel like we're just on that endless stretch of. Oh. Day after day. Day after day. It's still nothing's better. It's still the same. I can't see the end. All we want to do is quit.

I just want to take a break. I just want to cruise. How do we keep going? How do we keep going?

What's our focus? So here we have a text. Where Paul talks about his focus. What keeps him going? He urges us to think like him.

[11 : 51] These first 14 verses of chapter 3 are about his experience. And then in verse 15 he turns it to application to them.

And says now you think the same. You follow me. Verse 17. You imitate me in these things. So he's given all of this illustration. His example for a purpose that they might follow him.

That they might do as he do. That he might think like he thinks. Press on for the prize. Now this all comes in the context in chapter 3. Where Paul has talked about verse 1.

Rejoicing in the Lord. Which involves guarding against the joy stealers. Those who put their confidence in the flesh. And that the gladness and the joy in the Lord comes also from glorying in Christ.

From putting all our confidence not in ourselves but into him. And Paul begins to talk about that in his own life. How he has had all of these things that he was confident in before.

[12:58] And now he regards them as loss. He has forfeited them willingly. That he might gain more of Christ. That he might know him on a deeper level.

And so in verses 7 to 11. As we looked at the last couple of Lord's days. His goal has been to know Christ more deeply.

To know the power of his resurrection. And the fellowship of his sufferings. To become more and more conformed to Christ. To become more and more like him. And so this has been his example. He goes from gladness to glorying. To the goal of gaining more of Christ. And now he's not done. But he does kind of bring up now a new thing. In verse 12 to 16.

He relates that joy. And the pleasure in Christ. To an ongoing pursuit. Of Christ. He's not done.

[13:57] And I think he addresses something very, very important. That maybe today we need to hear. Maybe we need to be reminded of again. I know I do.

That how do we maintain joy. In the long haul. How do we persevere well.

How do we finish well. Some of us. Me. I feel like I'm on the other side of that hill.

How do I finish well. Last. A couple weeks ago. I mentioned that Paul had been. 27 years. Right. Since he had been converted. To the time that he's writing this letter. To the Philippians. And a couple weeks ago. Mr. Don Reimer was here. And he said. 27 years.

[14:53] That. That. That was. How long he'd been following Christ. Just this year. Right. 27 years. So. Oh. Good for you. I'm. Oh. I'm like 40. Years.

So. But on my mind. Is finishing well. I want to finish well. I hope I have many more years left. I don't know. I don't know.

But I want to finish well. However much time the Lord gives me. And so this pursuit. So. How do we maintain joy in the long haul?

How do we persevere to the end? Do well? Well. Paul explains it. From his perspective. Based on two convictions. I think. One. Is a conviction. That he keeps pressing on.

He keeps. He's pursuing Christ. He's not done. Pursuing Christ. He's not arrived. He's. And now he's just coasting. He continues. With all of his expertise.

[15:56] With all of his. Things that he's accomplished. All the churches he's planted. And. All the sufferings he's gone through. You think. You know. Let's take a day off here. Not that he doesn't take a day off.

But. Just cruise for a while. But Paul still wants to be. Pursuing. And then secondly. In verses. 15 and 16. He turns it to application. For them.

That. This whole pursuit of Christ. Is. A sign. Of maturity. As a Christian. One of the ways. You know. That you have.

Grown. And. And. And matured. As a follower of Christ. That you still. Continue. To pursue him. So let's look at these two convictions.

First conviction is. As Paul says in 12 to 14. Is. That pursuing Christ. Is driven. By. Christ's. Pursuit of us. My pursuit of Jesus.

[16:54] Is driven by Jesus's pursuit. Of me. Paul says. In verse 12. I press on. To make it my own.

Why? Because Christ Jesus. Has made me. His own. So Jesus works first. Jesus has pursued me. He has. Grabbed hold of me.

Now I want to go. Grab hold. More of what he has. Grabbed hold of me. For. So let's look at that. Why? Why is there a pursuit?

Well. Paul is keenly aware. That he's not arrived. He's not perfect. Not that I've already. Obtained this. Or have become perfect. It's not perfect.

No one. Can. Be perfect. In the flesh. There were. In his days. Those who believe. They could become perfect. They could become. Sinless. There are those.

[17:51] In our. Christian culture today. Who believe the same thing. Believe they can. Come to sinless perfection. I've met them. They have a very low view.

Of sin. Very high view. Of themselves. Paul himself says. Nah. Nah. Not while we're in the flesh.

I keep striving. We do grow. We do overcome some things. And then. What does Christ do? He usually reveals something else. Or something. A side view of. What I thought I was getting over. Or whatever. So. He keeps us humble that way. But he keeps pressing on. He keeps. It's an ongoing resolve. I keep pursuing.

I keep going on. Why? Because Christ has seized me. Christ has overtaken me. And so I wish to. Seize more of him.

[18 : 47] That for which he seized me. So. When was that? When did. Paul get seized? Well. It's a perfect description of his conversion. In Acts chapter 9.

Acts 9 begins out. Not Paul. But Saul. Remember his former name was Saul. Was breathing threats. And murder. Against the disciples of the Lord.

And the high priest. Sent Paul. With letters. To go and arrest. These disciples of Jesus. Up in Damascus. And on his way.

To go arrest them. Paul himself was. Arrested. He was knocked to the ground. Blinded by the light.

And Paul said. No. First the Lord spoke. Saul. Saul. Why are you persecuting me?

[19 : 44] And Saul said. Who are you Lord? Here comes the game changer. I am Jesus. Whom you are persecuting. Oh.

I thought Jesus was false. I thought Jesus was a false messiah. I got to rethink things now.

Because now Jesus is actually.

The Lord. Game changer. He's going. Now. Here's the picture. He's going to arrest. On his way. He is arrested. And now. He was not seeking Jesus.

He was not interested in Jesus. He wanted to squash Jesus. And the followers of Jesus. In his. Zeal for the law. He totally believed. That was.

False. And now he finds out from heaven. And now he's going a whole different. Now he's going to be a zealot for Christ. Now he's going to. Serve Christ.

[20 : 40] He was arrested. Now not in Acts 9. But later. In Acts. As Paul tells his testimony. Over and over again. About this experience. He gives. More information.

About what that change was. Acts 9. We don't find out. But. Later. Paul says. The Lord told me. On that conversion. That he chose me.

For a purpose. You will. Suffer for my name. Greatly. But I'm calling you. To be a. Apostle. To the Gentiles.

You're going to go to the Gentiles. So that you might bring light. Into the darkness. That you might turn them. From the kingdom of. Darkness. To the kingdom of. The son. That's your purpose.

That's why I arrested you. That's why I grabbed you. I grabbed you. Not just to save you. But to put you on a mission. And so Paul says.

[21 : 39] I'm still pressing on. For Christ. To take that. Purpose for which he grabbed me. That mission. The reason. Why Christ. Arrested me. To put me into service.

That's what I continue to pursue. He caught me for a reason. He arrested me for a reason. Now I'm pursuing. That. He describes it as a picture.

In verse 13. He says. I do not consider. That I have made it my own. But one thing I do. Forgetting what lies behind. And straining forward. To what lies ahead. I press on.

Toward the goal. Of the prize. He's picturing a race. He keeps going. One thing. One thing I do. Forgetting what's behind.

And stretching out. To what's ahead. He's a runner. Now forgetting what's behind. That might be a misleading translation. Because it's not.

[22 : 35] That he's. Totally forgetting. Paul hasn't forgotten his past. He just listed in verses. Four through six. I was this. This. This. This. This. This. He brings up.

That he was a. A sinner. That he was a bad sinner. That he would. Had persecuted the church. He hasn't forgotten the past. So it's not that we forget it. In fact. It's important that we do remember some of those things.

It's more that. He's overlooking. Those things. That word might be better translated. Overlook. Not. Not focusing on them. In other words. Not making it my motivation.

I got to make up for the past. Or I've got to be better. Or something like that. He just said. Yeah. The past is there. There are. There are things I need to remember about that. They're part of my testimony. But.

It's not my focus. So kind of. Overlooking. The things of the past. And those might even be failures. They might be successes. You know. Some people live on their past successes.

[23 : 34] Especially some older Christians. Who are. Kind of. So. You know. Now I'm here. I've served. I've done my time for Jesus. You ever met folks like that? I've met folks like that.

They talk about what they used to do for Jesus. That's great. But it's as if. Well. You may not be doing those same things. But you're still doing something. For Jesus. Aren't you? Still pursuing. Still growing. Yeah. We. We. We. We get to a point where. Okay. I can't. I can't hang out with those. Teenagers anymore. I don't have the energy for that. Love them. But now.

I kind of. You know. Pick my. Still want to spend time with teenagers. But not. What I use. Not overnight. So. You know. That kind of thing. So. So. Recognize. I have limits.

And I. But. I don't. I don't stop altogether. Thanks for being here. Yeah. Um. So.

[24 : 32] Not looking back. Oh. We could get stuck on our failures of the past. You know. We. We. We. thing. So I overlook him.

I don't forget him, but I overlook him. I don't get distracted by it. But stretching out, keeping my focus ahead, keeping my eyes on the goal. My motivation is before me. And what is it that motivates him? He talks about a prize.

A goal for the prize. Verse 14, I press forward toward the goal. Toward the finish line. I'm aimed at the finish line.

What keeps me going? I got the finish line, but it's not the finish line that motivates me. Finish line brings the prize. The prize is what I want.

The prize to receive the reward. And what is the reward? He calls it now the prize of the upward call of Christ Jesus.

[25 : 36] The upward call of God in Christ Jesus. It's the call that goes up. It was the call of God that came way back in Acts 9, right? The one that originally opened my eyes and it was originally just a call to God.

It was just a call into relationship. It was a call into fellowship. But then, as I got to know it, it was also a call to keep following. So Jesus calls people to come to him, but he also calls them to deny themselves and take up their cross and fall.

So it's an ongoing call. But then it's also, that's not it, it's also an ultimate call to heaven. It's an upward call. It's going up.

The way up is down. Right? But it's an upward call. It's a call to heaven. It's a call to hear the words of Christ say, well done.

Good and faithful servant. Oh, we want to hear that. To finish well. So, Paul is likening the Christian life to a race.

[26 : 51] And as my favorite baseball manager says, it's not over until it's over. We keep running the race. We press on. We follow Christ to the end. It might be a long, hard road.

There might be times that I want to quit. But I remember this race. And so Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, again, using this picture, this race analogy, he says, do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize?

So run that you may obtain it, that you may gain it. And he explains, every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we, an imperishable.

So I do not run aimlessly. I do not box as one beat in the air, but I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others, I myself should become disqualified.

So Paul is aware that to keep running, there's got to be a discipline and a self-control. Now, Paul's words there, they're true.

[28 : 05] You know, run that you may win, okay, rah, rah, self-control, discipline, yeah, great, rah, rah. I'm getting at where I have been.

Those words aren't real motivating to me in the middle of the race. when I'm tired, okay, just discipline yourself. Okay, yeah, right. You know, they remind me of playing ball, fourth quarter, pick it up, and okay, I can do that in the fourth quarter because there's only a couple of minutes left, but in the Christian life, I don't see the end.

How much longer do I have to discipline me? Because I can only do it for so long. I'm talking about me. How do I do that? So, so I read Paul's words and it's like, I know they're true, I know they're true, I don't deny them, I, but man, this whole self-control and this discipline and you know, I need motivation.

So, there's another place in scripture that talks about this race as well and it's Hebrews 12. How do we keep running? How do we keep the focus when we want to quit? Listen to the words of Hebrews 12.

He said, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin which so, that clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

[29 : 37] Okay, there's, there's the same words as Paul. Let us run the race with endurance. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, great, great, great. How? Looking to Jesus.

There's your focus. Looking to Jesus. I'm running that 12 mile and in the middle four when I want to quit, what am I looking at? I'm not looking to Jesus, I'm looking to Delinda.

And that was a temporary motivation that worked at that time. for the long race, the only focus that will get me and keep me in the race is looking to Jesus.

Look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. So he started my faith, he was the founder, he authored it, he gave it to me when I, when he first opened my eyes and brought me to life, he gave me faith to believe, but he's not only the founder of the faith, but he's the perfecter of the faith.

So in the middle of the race when my faith is failing, when my faith is weak, he's the perfecter of my faith. I look to him, give me more faith, strengthen my faith.

[30 : 54] Pray for me, Lord, like you did for Peter. Let his faith not fail. Keep his faith strong as he endures. who, Hebrews 12 goes on, what is it that motivated Jesus when he was in the race?

Who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. How did Jesus get through it? For the joy set before him.

His eyes were forward. His eyes were forward. In the garden as he's praying three times, let this cup pass, let this cup pass. Okay, not my will, but thine be done. Why?

Because it's about the Father. It's about after this. There will be a resurrection. There will be joy set before me, reunited with the Father, glorified over him.

Right? And then, I don't have it in your notes, but Hebrews 12, the next verse 3, goes on to say, consider him.

[32 : 00] He's talking about looking to Jesus, but consider him. Think about him. Who endured hostility against himself? Consider him, and then it gives this little phrase at the end of verse 3 that I just love.

so that you may not grow tired or faint-hearted. So that you may not quit in the middle of the race.

What will keep you in the race? What will give you the motivation when you feel like I'm faint-hearted, when I'm weakened, and I'm depressed, and I want to quit?

Looking to Jesus. Considering him. What was the joy that got him through it? The joy that was set before him, just as we have joy set before us.

So pursuing Christ is driven by Christ's pursuit of us. He has pursued me like he pursued Paul. He has arrested me like he arrested Paul.

[33 : 07] He has chosen me for a reason. And it's that reason that I want to arrest and press on for.

Because he pursued me for a reason. I want to pursue him and what he's pursued me for to the end. And I can only do that by being driven by him.

Remembering he chose me. And remember that he's still with me in this race. That I can keep looking to him. And he can keep perfecting my faith. He can keep strengthening me so that I can keep going.

So, are you running the Christian race? How you doing? Depends on the week, right? Depends on the month.

Depends on the season. After the year we've had, we're all having a little temptations to be distracted. No doubt. If you've lost the desire to grow, let me just speak to you if you have.

[34 : 16] If you're kind of cruising, kind of just hanging, you know, barely hanging, you know, struggling. If you've lost the desire to grow, you've lost sight of Christ.

Simple as that. Look to him. If you want to get back in. If Christ is speaking to you today to say, okay, I arrested you before, but I'm going to nab you again.

Just look at me. So, Paul turns from his example now in verses 15 and 16 to apply these things to them.

He says to them in verse 15, let those of us who are mature think this way. Let those of us who are mature think this way.

So, in other words, continual, here's a second conviction, continual pursuit of Christ thinking this way reveals Christian maturity.

[35 : 21] Let those of us who are mature think this way. In other words, thinking this way of pursuing Christ, of continuing to follow him all to the end is a sign of maturity.

Those who are mature do think that way. It's a mark of maturity. It shows your maturity. So, you may not feel mature.

You may be struggling, but you know and you're thinking, I keep pursuing. I keep pursuing. There's your maturity. He applies it.

Let us now. He's been talking about himself. I've done this. I've done this. I, I, I. Now it's let us. Now he brings them in. Let us think this way.

This is how mature believers think. We continue to pursue Christ to the end. Ephesians 4, part of our, we've adopted for our purpose statement of our church that we, that we, uh, continue to train people and equip people for the work of service.

[36 : 27] And, and verse 13 in Ephesians 4 says, we keep doing this until we all attain to the unity of the faith to maturity, to maturity of the stature of Christ.

And so we recognize that in our own mission. What we're doing, what we do intentionally, we train, we teach, we equip so that the body serves one another and we keep doing that until we all reach that maturity, until we all reach unity in the faith of what we believe and in the knowledge of the Son of God and mature to Christ level.

So how long does that take? Three months? Five classes? You'll be mature with Christ, right? We know. Okay, how do I reach Jesus' level? Okay, well that's my lifetime thing.

But I want to get more and more like Him. So He says, let us think. Direct our mind to this.

This is an attitude. My attitude. Pressing on is a way of thinking. Okay? A pursuit of Christ, a continual pursuit of Christ is a way of thinking.

[37 : 40] It's an attitude. Do I have that? I can lose that. I can get distracted. Well, Paul gives a concession here, a qualification.

He says in verse 15, the second part of verse 15, and if in anything you think otherwise. That's interesting. If in anything, if you think anything differently, God will reveal that also to you.

It's interesting. If they think differently, I think, Paul isn't talking about a serious doctrinal difference, because if he was, he would deal with it, like he does in Galatians.

He would deal with it. That's a different gospel. I think he's talking about a difference of weakness. of being overwhelmed.

It's not that, like when I was in my depression, it's not that I thought differently. I still knew what was right. I struggled with doing it. Really struggled with doing it.

[39 : 00] So if you think differently, you know, your attitude, in other words, kind of changed. You know, I need a break. I need a... It's not that I know, that I know it's, I think that it's not about pursuing Christ.

It's that I'm too weak for it. So in other words, if you're thinking different, if your attitude's different, that you know what, I've had too many failures. I'm too inconsistent. Maybe you think, you know, for Paul, you know, he's all gung-ho, but me, I'm too weak.

I have too many inadequacies. I don't have it in me. And we can think like that. We get discouraged like that. Especially in the middle, when we're in that long stretch in the middle, and I can't see and it's just...

I'm thinking, okay, I do need to sit down. I just need to take a break for a while. So I think Paul's saying, you know, if you're thinking differently, if you have that kind of attitude, I get it.

He's not saying, shame on you. He's saying, I get it. In fact, I trust God's grace to work in your life. God will reveal that to you. He'll show you.

[40 : 19] I'm not going to pound on you while you're down. I'm going to just let God deal with you. I've already told you. Here's a sign of maturity. And if you're struggling with that, okay.

And Paul had been through his struggles. He had the thorn in the flesh and he prayed three times for it to be removed. Please, Lord, please take it.

This is hindering me. Nope. Nope. It's for your good. I want you weak, Paul. I want you weak.

I want you struggling. I want you hurting. I want you pestered by this messenger of Satan. Wow. Can't we just have a power encounter and get rid of it, Lord?

No. You need it to humble you. Because you've had some extra privileges. You've been up to the higher revelation area.

[41 : 20] And I don't want your head getting too, you know, I'm special. So to counter that specialness, yeah, you are special. But not that special. So we're just going to put a little pin in that balloon.

Well, can it just be a short-term thing? No. No, you're going to keep it. And what does he do? He comes around and says, you know what? You're right. That's good. Because God gets the glory. That's what I really want. So I'm glad to boast in my weakness so that I can boast in God's strength. So, you know, he gets it. I think this is later in Paul's life.

Earlier, remember, he didn't have time for Mark. Remember, he goes on his first journey and Mark quits. Mark didn't persevere. Mark quit on the first journey.

And so when they come to take the second journey, he and Barnabas have a big argument.

Remember that? Barnabas says, oh, we've got to take Mark. We've got to take Mark. Paul says, I ain't taking Mark. I ain't taking Mark. Can't trust him.

[42 : 19] Can't count on him. He's a quitter. Years later, what does Paul say about Mark? Bring me Mark.

I need Mark. He's a good man. I think Paul's softened over the years after he's been through some of the thorns and all that kind of stuff. I think he's kind of, okay, now I get it.

Okay, yeah, I get it. And in Timothy, when he writes to Timothy, he's so gentle with Timothy. He's so gentle. I mean, Timothy's like, not Paul.

He's timid. You know, he's reticent to get into that war. I like Timothy. And Paul's just gently, come on, suffer with me.

Come on. Remember your calling. Remember your gift. It's not fear. Right? It's power, love, discipline. So, I think that's Paul here.

[43 : 23] That's what I'm hearing from Paul is this qualification. If you think different, different attitude. In other words, you're really struggling. You think, man, I'm just weak. I got it.

God will get you. Be patient. God will reveal. God will deal with you. Hope it doesn't take you 12 years like me, but it's, you know, he will deal with you.

He'll show you. And then finally, verse 16, it's just kind of a final reiteration, an emphasis of what's priority.

He kind of says, nevertheless, you know, whatever, back to what's important. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

At the end of the day, if you're not ready for the other stuff, at the end of the day, keep holding true. It's a military term that actually means to walk in an orderly fashion.

[44 : 21] You know, keep walking. Keep, keep. It's not keep in line. It's, it's kind of keep in step. Paul uses it in Galatians 5. He talks about walking with the spirit.

It's best translated, same word, to keep in step with the spirit. I like that. You know, you're walking with the spirit. You're not, you're not kind of walking and trying to drag the spirit.

It's, I'm walking with, keep it. Oh, oh, okay. It's kind of like following Jesus. Where are we going?

Okay. I got this to do today.

Okay. You let me know if it changes. Keeping in step. And keeping in step with what? Well, what you've attained. In other words, what, what do you know?

What do you know? What has become important? What is it that matters? Well, to live is Christ, to die is gain. That's what matters. The gospel of Christ. That's what matters. What Jesus originally called me to do, to, to deny myself, to take up my cross and follow him.

[45 : 23] That's what matters. So, so don't get weighed down by a lot of things. If you're kind of stuck for right now, just, just hold firm, keep in step with the basic stuff that you know.

Just keep walking with him. Keep in step with the spirit. He'll guide you. He'll comfort you. He'll bring you where he wants you to be. So, he talks about maturity, that, that this continual pursuit of Christ reveals Christian maturity.

It's a sign of Christian maturity. What is it that distinguishes Christian maturity? When do we know we're maturing in Christ? How, how, how does that look?

I mean, I get that it looks that I'm thinking that I keep following Christ, but, how else is it defined in scripture? So, we go to Hebrews chapter five, where the Hebrew writer describes maturity, in contrast with immaturity.

He says to the, to whoever's writing Philippians, I think it's Barnabas, but it doesn't matter. He's writing to these people who, he says, for by this time, you ought to be teachers.

[46 : 45] By this time, by, by, by now, you should be teachers. Time has gone by. You should be teachers. But what? You need someone to teach you again. Teach you what?

The basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food. Hmm. For everyone who lives on milk, which is for toddlers, is, watch this, unskilled in the word of righteousness.

Or, a better translation, not unskilled, because that sounds like it's a technical. It's unfamiliar with the word. You haven't spent time in the word.

A mark of maturity is spending time. You become familiar with it. You, you, you gain experience in it. And you be, the one who lives on milk is unskilled, inexperienced in the word of righteousness because he's a child.

Solid food is for the mature. For those who have their powers, watch this, of discernment, trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

[47 : 58] That's what maturity looks like. Christian maturity takes time. It's deepening in the word, becoming familiar with the word. And then, as they not only become familiar with the word, now they're seeking to apply it.

It doesn't mean they're experts in the word, but they can become familiar with it. They're reading it. They're not just reading it to kind of check it out. They're reading it to learn, to see how to apply it.

That's a sign of maturity. Taking the word. They become trained by constant practice.

They're not trained because they took a class. They're not trained because they know the original language. They're trained because they're seeking to apply it. Seeking to live by it.

It's the same thing Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. What's the difference between the house built on the rock and the house built on the sand? Right? They both experienced the storms. What is it about the wise one?

[48 : 59] The wise one is founded on the, what? The rock, which is, Jesus compares to whoever hears these words of mine and acts upon them is like the wise man.

Hears my words, familiar with it, and acts on it. So, that's what Christian maturity is. You know, he talks about milk and solid food.

You know, especially you who are moms, and you know, I remember many, many years ago having babbles in our arms. Seemed like so long ago. But I remember, you know, when they're really young, you give them milk, right?

They can't chew solid food. But over time, they start getting teeth, you know, and they, I don't know what the signs are that you know when you start to stuff the meat down their throat, but that takes time, right?

It takes time. But at some point, you do that. You don't expect them to be drinking milk all the rest of their life. It's silly. And by the way, the writer of Hebrews, when he says, you know, you still want milk, what does he do?

[50 : 12] He doesn't give milk. I would not call the book of Hebrews milk. It's deeper thinking. It's solid food. So he doesn't kind of can, what's the word?

Do what they want. He challenges them to think. So, constant pursuit of Christ is a sign of Christian maturity.

Is that you? Is that me? Is our thinking maturing? Are we staying in the word? Are we careful to apply it? I have to be careful about this because it's my job to be in the word.

I have to present it. But I have discovered that I can do that in a way that's over here.

I can study it to teach it. Not to apply it. So that's not maturity. Maturity is I can hear it for myself.

[51 : 25] Sometimes, you know, people say, you know, something about the message. I'm like, yeah, I had to hear it all week. So, you know, I had to work on me all week and I needed to hear it too. I pray the Lord keeps me in that kind of humble position.

Yeah, I need to keep learning it. Yeah, I don't arrive either. Do you sense that Christ has you? You know, Paul talks about, you know, I seek to lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of.

Do you sense Christ has you? Do you remember when he grabbed you? Do you sense that he still has you? And is that what drives you?

Is that what propels you to seize more of him? If you've lost your desire to grow, you've lost your sight of Jesus.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for Paul's example and for his challenge. Lord, help us to hear his word and see not the duty of pressing on to see it as this work and this discipline though that's involved in it.

[52 : 41] but Father, help us to see the heart of it, what really drives it, what, especially when we are weak, what brings us back is looking to Christ and remembering how he laid hold of us.

Help us, oh Father, to apprehend that and find your power in it. This we pray in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.