

The Pressing on Pursuit

Intro

What type of picture or imagery would you use to describe your Christian life? As you look back over the months and years what has been the feel flavor of your spiritual life since the day that you gave your life to Jesus Christ. For Paul the apostle that answer is found in our text the imagery he uses to describe his Christian life is that of an athlete passionately straining towards a prize – and I think his direction and exhortation through the HS inspiration will be helpful and challenging to all of us.

- Paul was seized by the power of a great affection vs 7-8... And this is amazing because Paul is in *prison*...
- In ch 1 he opens by praying for the church and thanking God for them but we also learn that Paul is in house arrest... **1:12-13** he goes on to praise God for how the advancement of the gospel is working in ch 1.
- In ch 2 Paul's Charges the church to be united, to remain humble, and to live lives worthy of Christ...
- But in ch 3 the letter takes an autobiographical turn... This is where Paul shares his testimony and we've read part of it already here this morning...
- In vs 8 Paul said he had come to know Christ but that was not the end – but rather the beginning

This morning I want to call our attention to mentality that drives this amazing spiritual growth mindset... and in closing we'll look at a few commands that are given to us and some applications in light of the call to press on.

I. The "pressing on" mentality 12-14

- 1. The Attitude: Pressing mindset all begins with the attitude of humble intensity. (define those terms)**

When Paul took stock on the state of his own spiritual practice he was humbled by his utter imperfection AND driven forward with spiritual zeal.

In other words he looked at himself – his own character – his own obedience and concludes *"I have not arrived."*

This is the beginning of all true spiritual growth... As soon as we think we've learned it all, or done it all we begin to trend towards arrogance and complacency

Rom 12:3 records this same idea in the form of a command.

So on the one hand we see he is acknowledging his obvious imperfection... but that imperfection is not driving him towards passivity or self pity or hopelessness. So we too must refuse letting our utter imperfection and lack of Christlikeness and maturity derail our lives or spiral down into despair. *This text calls us to push and strive and strain to know Christ more deeply.*

On the one hand he is **acknowledging his imperfection**.

- 12 “I have not already obtained it... I’m not already perfect...”
- 13 “I don’t regard that I’ve laid hold of...”
- vs 13 uses an accounting term **λογίζομαι** – it carries with it the idea of precision or record keeping... So when Paul did an internal spiritual audit he overwhelmingly concluded I’m not there yet in the Christian life... *(is that the perspective you have?)*

Most of us are smart enough, and sophisticated enough in our Christianity to avoid statements like “I’ve reached sinless perfection.”

But what about how we present ourselves to one another – whether in this fellowship or in small group or some other context? Do we present ourselves as being all happy and polished up without any struggles, disappointments or areas where we are in need of growth and repentance?

In fact the more we walk with Christ and draw near to him the more we see just how far we have to grow. But when you look at that long road of growth ahead don’t lose sight of the other half of the attitude piece. Its humility *paired with intensity* that keeps reading, and keeps praying, and keeps saying “honey will you forgive me” and keeps pursuing Christ!

When humility and intensity are paired together – it is then when we are able to push past the status quo. Lets give god the glory for how he has worked and is working in this church – but don’t stagnate, don’t plateau in your heart for Jesus Christ, don’t tread spiritual water – swim forward; press on towards greater purity, greater humility, greater service one to another, greater devotion to the word of God, greater love and obedience to our king... *I need that do you?*

A great Promise in vs 12b

Before we move on here look at the end of vs 12 carefully.... There is a great promise here... the perfection we are striving towards is the very thing for which we have been saved in the first place... The Christlikeness that we press towards isnt just what we’re working toward but what God is guaranteeing because it is his purpose and plan to grant to us by grace the very thing we press towards!!

That perfection / Christ like character / full and final holiness / ... I press on to lay hold of it, but God has already laid hold of me for the very same purpose...

God laid ahold of you believer for a purpose that purpose... Rom **8:29**.... Eph **1:4** God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

2. **The Exertion:** Pressing on towards greater Christlikeness requires maximum effort and singular focus.

We can see this plain as day in vs 12 and 13 and 14 with all the active verbs... The whole tone and vibe of this passage is active, engaged, and urgent...

It's not passive. It's not reactive, its not "we'll see if we have time in our life and our schedule for growth... no its an intentional "I. press. On."

That verb literally it means to make haste in the active pursuit of running after something. In fact it is a word that is picked up out the world of athletics. This whole passage is dripping with the imagery and feel of Greek stadium. In cities like Athens and Ephesus and many others, the stadium was center for athletic competition and entertainment... and we can see that imagery in our text the sprinter running towards the goal and the prize in vs 14

[This takes me back into the imagery and memories of running track and field](#)

Do you get the picture? Imagine someone day after day – training for a race pushing themselves straining forward, Pressing on to greater performance, faster times, better form, more precision in the blocks, taller stance training pushing advancing... That is the imagery here...

Is that your posture towards spiritual growth in the Christian life? When it comes to guarding your heart, or guarding your eyes, or filling your mind with God's word... is this your posture?

When it comes to spiritual disciplines and spiritual growth are you giving maximum effort?

Often in scripture we are reminded of the growing process with the imagery of athletics or competition.

1 Cor 9:24-27 do you not know that those who run in a race all run but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Paul is saying, I Run to win, I fight to land punches... I am not pretending I am not doing off-season training I'm not merely sparing with my sin... I discipline my body – I beat my body so that I not my passions or my emotions in control that I might not be exposed and disqualified as a hypocrite.

Again, Look at your Christian life – ask yourself truly if you are honestly making maximum effort in your Christian life? Are you jogging around the park or running to win?... What steps are we taking? – what is different this fall from last spring? What applications are we making, what strides are being taken? What sinful habits and

attitudes are we mortifying? What disciplines are we cultivating? Are you pursuing growth?

In the end, *wanting* to grow spiritually – and *putting forth maximum diligent effort* are not the same thing. I like how one preacher illustrated it this way. (Learning to Play concert Piano) Sometimes we want to be mature, we want to be godly, we want to grow but we don't want the exertion and discipline it takes to continue pressing on. **1 Tim 4:7-8**

But as we noted this exertion is marked by both maximum effort, and singular focus. Paul has the laser focus to say “this one thing I do” Those are pretty incredible words... It is very rare to hear *anybody* say “this **one** thing I do.”

*As Americans we often dabble in 50 things and do nothing... For the Apostle Paul, the **single** driving burden that directed his spiritual life, and his daily decisions was to be like Christ and know him more. All of his ministry and all of his decisions were funneled into that focus point.*

3. The Perspective: Pressing on involves reaching towards the future, not lingering in the past.

Interestingly enough that “one thing I do” in verse 13 is defined in context by two participles – two “ing” verbs. 1) Forgetting what is behind 2) straining forward toward what lies ahead.

This is an important principle for ongoing growth – we cannot allow ourselves to be controlled by our past. So many people have pain, and shame and bitterness and grudges from the past – brothers, sisters let it go!

You can't run a race looking backwards...

Friends the past often poses a real threat to the “pressing-on mentality.” Being focused on the past is the wrong perspective;

If our past was messy and sinful with foolishness and regret... and if we focus on that we're often hindered from growing in the future and hindered from fixing our eyes on Jesus.

If our past journey of sanctification and mortification of sin has left us with many scars and we obsess over our failures or slowness of progress we cannot run the race well. We cannot believing God's forgiveness and power to continue his good work in us the way he desires.

By focusing on the shame, and sin, and failure of the past we can hindered from the joy, growth, and fellowship God desires for our lives.

Paul had a messy past **1 Tim 1:12-15**, blasphemer a persecutor a violent aggressor.” Cf Acts 8

Paul had a past, but by being focused on it, he could have remained troubled, and guilt ridden to the point of spiritual paralysis.

But there is another side to this. Some people stall out and fail to grow and press on in the present, because they rely on, and appeal to past seasons of victory, joy, or obedience *in order to* give themselves a free-pass on their present pursuit of Godliness.

Tortoise and the hare...

After a while you remember what the hare does? he decides to take a nap) *why?*
Because he is depending on the speed and work of yesterdays race for todays needs.

If we live in the past of the good ol days we open ourselves to the threat of complacency and apathy and spiritual coasting... You are especially vulnerable to this if you are older or have been a Christian for a long time. That is the opposite of the pressing on mindset for Paul isn't it?

- Don't coast today when you need new grace and power and zeal to keep running the Christian life!
- Don't substitute your learning as a child for the need to continue to grow and learn and develop spiritually in discernment and wisdom
- Don't rationalize your need for present obedience and present growth with steps of change you've committed to in the past.
- Don't convince yourself that the personal devotional reading and meditating on scripture and doctrine is unimportant now because you have read the bible cover to cover.

Rather we should strain vs 13... some of your bibles say reaching forward to what lies ahead.

4. The Goal: Aim at Christ and at Christlikeness 3:14

Phil 3:14 (read) First let me draw your attention to those two words "goal and prize." These two terms refer to the same end point one from our point of view... and one as the gift of God's grace.

The Goal the end of the human race... for the athlete, the goal is to win the race and reach the finish...

The prize is what is awarded at the end of the race; the prize is given as a gift or reward to the runner. So this upward call is a goal-prize... that is ultimately described as the "upward call of God in Christ"

I'm going to suggest in this context that the upward call of God, is perfection / glorification which Paul says I haven't gotten there yet vs 12. BUT in addition to glorification as a status, Paul knows and anticipates that final glorification is also the time when he will see Christ face to face... (Remember the supreme treasure of vs 8 knowing Jesus Christ.)

It is the perfect status God gives and The perfect God himself

Remember what Paul said in **1 Cor 13:12?** “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.”

We cannot miss this... the secret of spiritual growth... the key to pressing on long-term is not a program, or set of disciplines but a focusing on Jesus himself. If a runner wants to run the race well his eyes must be where? Not on his shoes, not on his fellow runners, not up the crowd but on the finish line...

This is the exact same thing that the author of Hebrews said in Heb ch 12 he exhorts to run the race with endurance – *how?* Fixing our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.

This is what makes us want to run and press ahead...

II. The “Pressing on” Imperatives

1. To mature in the Lord this is the mindset you *must* have 3:15

If you are reading a NASB it says let as many of who are *perfect* think this way. That word for perfect is a wonderful word and it doesn't mean morally perfect as in without sin... that is obvious because the whole point of this passage is Paul saying “I’m not perfect now and I know it, but I’m pressing towards a day when one day I will be.” This word. τελιος in the Greek refers to something that has reached its end – something that has fulfilled a certain purpose – something that is fully grown or *mature*...I thin that maturity is the meaning Paul is emphasizing here.

If you want to be *mature* in the Christian life you must embrace rather than oppose the pressing on mindset.

We don’t get the liberty according to **3:15** to say “*that’s interesting... I’m going to go on with my life and figure out some lunch plans*”... we don’t get say “*sorry Paul you’re comeing on a little too strong... besides I think I’m going to pursue other goals anyway*” We need to respond to this message and this passage by saying “I want to press on with you Paul!”

Some will disagree with you 15b there are some people that say you’re obsessing ... your taking it all so seriously... loosen up...! But **God** is the one who ultimately changes the heart. **God** is the one who has to reveal the importance of these things.

2. If we want to mature in the Lord, we must be consistent regardless of what others think. 3:16

There might be others who disagree as to the importance and attitude of spiritual growth in vs 16 but don't wander after that don't get sidetracked rather “keep living” this life.

Don't get caught up to just keep going with the flow of complacency... God directs us here no no... don't get discouraged don't get sidetracked keep moving *ahead*... keep running *forward* until that great day.

- *If you are running – continue to look unto Jesus the found and perfecter (Gal 6 take heed you who stand)*
- *If you are distracted by others or stalled out in the race – commit yourself afresh unto God...sins distractions...*

We've seen in God's word a tremendous standard and illustration as to how we ought to live the Christian life... the attitude, the exertion, the perspective, and the goal... we've seen the Holy Spirit then directed the apostle to not only *model* before us, but *command* us to follow his example.

As we close think about your approach to the Christian life compared to Paul...

Close: Never forget or get confused - **We're in the race because of Grace...**