

The sermon

Intro

When you hear press on, what comes to mind? I would think something like not giving up. Not quitting. Staying the course. That's part of it.

Pressing on also speaks also to pursuit of an unmet goal. Have you ever had a goal that seemed unattainable? Bernie's plans for the church property. He's got a lot of steps in his master plan. Those steps won't be met in a week I can assure you.

Maybe a spouse? I had my standards and the number of single Christian women in my age bracket in New Hampshire was close to none. You should have seen my hair at that time. Ghastly.

The aspiring doctor who sees the years required. It takes 10-14 years to become a doctor. 12 years on average. That's pursuit of a goal for over a decade. One of the reasons there's a shortage of doctors in our area.

This morning Paul lets us in on his unmet goal.

READ 3:2-16

Body

Passage Focus

Paul continues to reflect on his passion for knowing Jesus more.

Point 1: Press on by confessing we haven't attained perfection (3:12)

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. – 3:12

Obtained what? Perfect in what? Make what his own? That's why I read the previous section. Last week I said knowing Jesus meant knowing Jesus experientially, relationally. As we go through life with Jesus, we come to know him more. Things like suffering. Life's challenges help us to know Jesus more. How he works inside our hearts, guides us with his word, and sends his people to minister to us.

In 3:10, Paul spoke of sharing *"his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."* Paul isn't perfect in that he hasn't fully become like Jesus "in his death." Paul hasn't obtained the level of obedience demonstrated by Jesus at the cross. Paul's life has not yet fully conformed to Jesus' perfect, sinless obedience. Paul has room to grow so he presses on to become more like Jesus.

What does Paul mean by the word perfect?

This is the verb form of the noun I emphasized in Colossians. Paul's goal for himself was the goal of his ministry to the churches:

*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone **mature** in Christ.* – **Colossians 1:28**

Mature and perfect are the same word. In Colossians, I repeatedly noted that maturity spoke to completeness. The idea of leaving **no area of our lives untouched by God's word**. Whether how we fellowship together, how we do marriage, how we parent, how we conduct ourselves at work, how we do personal evangelism. The gospel touches every area of our lives.

Paul knew his obedience wasn't complete. Paul still lacked. Paul still had room to grow.

Paul doesn't believe in the doctrine of Christian perfectionism. The view that we can become free of sin in this life. Paul recognizes lack in himself. Paul's recognition of his lack pushes him to "press on."

Press on

The word translated "press on" is a standard word for persecute. *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* Several verses earlier Paul noted how he was *"a persecutor of the church"* (3:6). Paul once pursued Christian mothers to separate them from their children. Now he pursues a different goal. That of being perfectly obedient like Jesus. **"Press on" speaks to pursuing a goal, whether good or bad.**

Application

Because we retain fleshly passions *"which wage war against [our] souls"* (1 Pet 2:11) until glorification, the pursuit goes on till we die. The pursuit never ends. The goal is never met. We never become completely like Christ.

Does that mean why bother? Not for Paul. How does he press on after an unattainable goal? Let's continue.

The question we need to ask ourselves is do I want to make progress?

Point 2: Press on by forgetting the past (3:13)

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind

One way Paul pursues the goal of perfect conformity to Jesus' obedience is by forgetting the past.

What does it mean to forget the past?

Do we burn up old photos? Never tell our kids about our childhood? Keep the old war stories to ourselves?

I don't think that's what Paul means. Note how Paul vividly recounted his past in 3:5-6. Paul wasn't afraid to bring up his past. Paul wasn't afraid to reflect on how knowing Jesus altered his life. Paul gave his past some thought.

What does Paul mean then? I think we can take a page out of Bill Belichick's motivational playbook. For those of you who don't know who I'm talking about, he's the head coach of the New England Patriots football team. Sports analogy.

Belichick's teams won six Super Bowls. How did he keep the team motivated? Former player Tedy Bruschi talked about Belichick's comments during the first team meeting of the new season:

"the very first meeting is, 'I don't care about anything in the past.' We win Super Bowls, 'last year doesn't matter.' Pro Bowls don't matter, All-Pros don't matter. 'Everything you've done last year doesn't matter, fellas. It's about who we are going forward.'" (<https://www.si.com/nfl/patriots/news/new-england-patriots-tedy-bruschi-calls-out-bill-belichick>)

Sounds a lot like Paul.

Application

That's not resting on past laurels. That's not being content with past achievements. That's not patting ourselves on the back. That's wanting more. A coach who doesn't care about the present because they did well in the past won't keep their job for long.

Same with us spiritually. I don't say I parented kid one well so I don't need to care about the rest. I don't say I preached a good sermon six months ago so I don't need to care anymore. We don't say I gave generously ten years ago so I can let up now. Or I was quite a good evangelist 20 years ago so I've filled my quota.

The Christian life is always ongoing. There's no looking back. There's always opportunity to be obedient today. There's always opportunity for spiritual progress.

Beware of spiritual complacency and apathy. Don't take progress casually.

Point 3: Press on by seeing the future (3:13-14)

and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul is "straining forward" to what lies ahead. I recently had a hernia surgery. One rule was no straining. Straining might prevent healing and ruin what was done on the inside. When we strain we exert effort. We push ourselves. We put stress on our body. Paul says it's right and proper for us to push ourselves spiritually.

Straining to scrape a pellet stove. Straining to scrape burnt food off a pot.

Like the long distance runner pushes themselves to the limits, we make every effort to kill sin and establish godly patterns in our life. We confess sin. We pray for God's help against temptation. We share our struggles with fellow believers. We turn to the Bible for wisdom. We read good Christian literature. Ccef.org understands the human struggle. We make use of the resources in the local church.

Here pressing on pictures a runner in a race. The runner strains forward with their eyes squarely on the finish line, not looking back, because that would give their opponents an edge. The goal being the gold medal and the highest financial purse.

Like the runner, we must be fixated on the goal. The goal here being Jesus' perfect obedience. "*What lies ahead*" being glorification when Jesus returns. Put in Philippians terms, "*work out your own salvation in fear and trembling*" (2:12) for the future "*glorious body*" (3:21).

That's pursuit of progress is maintained by keeping our eyes on the prize. The point is seeing the prize leads us to strain. How do we maintain focus and fight complacency? We keep our eyes on salvation future. Eyes on the future leads to faithfulness in the present.

Seeing what we'll become leads us to want more of that experience today.

Point 4: Press on by thinking in mature ways (3:15)

Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.
– 3:15

Paul includes his readers as those who are mature. Mature being the word for complete. While not fully complete, some of the Philippians had well-rounded Christian lives. They still lacked, but they had made considerable progress. They were in the same place as Paul spiritually.

Paul holds out the possibility that some won't agree with what he's saying. But he says, "I don't need to beat you over the head with these teachings. I trust God will reveal it to you." That's leaving it to God. Trusting God to do his work in his people.

Application

Paul's saying mature Christians recognize they still lack spiritually. Mature Christians don't rest on past accomplishments.

Mature Christians are focused on present spiritual progress. Mature Christians are moved to present faithfulness because their eyes are on the future.

I've heard it said that the more growth a person experiences the more sin they see in their lives. The person who knows their Bible and understands biblical spirituality has eyes to see that the Christian life is much more than doing daily devotions and keeping a set of Christian rules. We come to understand the human heart and our own selves.

The more growth we experience, the greater we see our own hearts. Paul saw his lack.

Point 5: Press on by remembering what we've already attained (3:12, 16)

Only let us hold true to what we have attained. – 3:16

The idea is keep living today in a way that's consistent with the progress we've already made. Progress attained shouldn't lead to apathy. Progress attained should lead to further progress. Don't stop now. Keep pursuing. Keep straining.

Application

How might this work? Seeing past growth should give us hope of future. I can overcome a foul mouth because I overcame drunkenness. I can love this person because I loved that person.

So we do remember the past in one way. We note the ways God has changed our lives. We forget the past in another sense. We don't let past faithfulness blind us to present faithfulness. Don't stop pursuing. Don't stop straining.

Non-Christian

Maybe you wouldn't consider yourself a Christian and you're visiting with us. What can you get out of this?

First, there's something wrong with the human race. We need to be changed because something went wrong. The Bible calls this the fall. Sin came into the world such that our entire being has been affected by sin. Thoughts, emotions, words, actions. Thus the need for spiritual progress.

Second, spiritual progress begins with knowing Jesus. That is coming into a right relationship with Jesus. Jesus died on the cross such that whoever believes can be forgiven and have eternal life. We turn from sin by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. From there our relationship with Jesus deepens and he changes us and we make spiritual progress.

Conclusion

Believer, **Press on**

by confessing we haven't attained perfection...

by forgetting the past...

by seeing the future...

by thinking in mature ways...

by remembering what we've already attained.