

PHILIPPIANS

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Pursuing God Relentlessly

Scripture

November 3, 2019

Philippians 3:7–14 (ESV)

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not 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. ¹³Brothers, 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, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Message

True Grace Creates Desire for More Grace

"To have found God and still to pursue Him is the soul's paradox of love, scorned indeed by the too easily satisfied religionist, but justified in happy experience by the children of the burning heart" —A.W. Tozer

"Wherever there is true grace there is a desire for more grace." —Matthew Henry

"The Spirit is not deadening; he is addicting. The evidence that you have him is that you want more of him. Continued indifference to growth in grace is a sign of no grace." —John Piper

Four Reasons We Must Relentlessly Pursue God

1. *We must relentlessly pursue Christ in order to know him.*

Paul pursued Christ, forsaking all the things people normally boast about; and he did it in order to know him. Verse 7 is past tense—probably referring to conversion ("I counted all loss"). Verse 8 is present tense: he continues to renounce everything that hinders his getting to know Christ.

Why?

Because knowing Christ is a value that surpasses everything else. The evidence of genuine conversion is whether you continually pursue Christ as your highest and best Joy.

We must pursue Christ relentlessly, because not to means that we don't want to know him. We must relentlessly pursue Christ, or eventually surrender our claim to own him as the Lord of joy.

Ephesians 3:17–19 (ESV)

"—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

2. *We relentlessly pursue Christ to confirm our justification.*

Philippians 3:8 (ESV) *"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."*

What does it mean to gain Christ and share God's righteousness?

To gain Christ is to enjoy his fellowship forever. Paul is speaking as a Christian and looking into the future and doing what he must do to gain Christ and be found clothed in God's righteousness and accepted into heaven.

Saving faith is not merely a one-time decision for Christ. Saving faith is an ongoing preference for Christ over all other values. The pursuit of Christ is the evidence of genuine faith in Christ as our highest treasure. We must relentlessly pursue Christ in order to confirm our justification.

Faith is the confident, continuous confession of total dependence on and trust in Jesus Christ for the necessary requirements to enter God's kingdom. It involves more than mere intellectual assent to the truth of the gospel; saving faith includes trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and surrender to His lordship. It is on the basis of faith alone that righteousness . . . comes from God to repentant sinners.¹

3. We must relentlessly pursue Christ because we are so imperfect.

"Not that I have already obtained or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own."

Not to relentlessly pursue Christ means that either we don't trust his power and willingness to change our imperfections, or that we want to cling to our imperfections. In either case, Christ is scorned, and we are lost.

4. We must relentlessly pursue Christ because He has made us His own.

Paul's conversion was not a cage to hold him back but a catapult into the pursuit of holiness. The irresistible grace of Christ overcoming Paul's rebellion and saving him from sin did not make Paul passive; it made him powerful! —John Piper

Philippians 2:12–13 (ESV)

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Work out your salvation, because God is at work in you. Your work is his work for his glory when done in dependence on his power. The most fundamental reason why you must relentlessly pursue Christ is that Christ is in you, moving you to relentlessly pursue him.

Three Steps in Pursuing God Relentlessly

1. Develop Holy Dissatisfaction

"I do not regard myself to have obtained."

Stand in front of the mirror of the Word and recognize that you have not yet arrived. The hearty admission of your spiritual imperfections is the starting point for the pursuit of God.

2. Forget the Things Which Lie Behind

Anything in your background which hinders your pursuit of God you should put out of your mind. The point is not: never look back. The point is: only look back for the sake of pressing forward. Never substitute nostalgia for hope. Give humble thanks for successes; make humble confessions for failure; then turn to the future and go hard after God.

3. Strain Forward to What Lies Ahead

1 Corinthians 9:25–27 (ESV)

Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. ²⁷But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The way to relentlessly pursue God is with all the discipline and self-denial of an athlete. Set yourself a goal to know more of the Word of God, to grasp more of the will of God, to love more of the wonder of God; and then make a plan of prayer, study and worship and go for it with all your might.

Conclusion

Develop a holy dissatisfaction with your spiritual attainments, put out of your mind anything in the past which hinders your pursuit of God, strain forward like an athlete. For imperfect as we are, it is God who is at work in us to will and to do his good pleasure. We do not run in our own strength and, all the more therefore, we can be assured that relentlessly pursuing a holy God will bring us to know him deeply and enjoy the sweet confirmation of our justification.²

¹MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2001). *Philippians* (p. 238). Chicago: Moody Press.

²Piper, J. (2007). *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)*. Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God.