SERMON: GRACE FOR THE IMPERFECT

Philippians 3:12-14
(12) Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. (14) I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Introduction
This familiar passage of Scripture is like a multifaceted diamond; it displays beauty at many angles. As I read it recently, it struck me that Paul, one of the most gifted and educated saints of the Bible, had a deep sense of imperfection. To counter-balance his sense of imperfection, Paul speaks, in other passages, of the grace of God which "picks up the slack" and gives us hope.

We live in a fallen, flawed world. This is due to the original sin of Adam and Eve. In this fallen world we are under double jeopardy. We have to deal with the consequences of the original sin and we also have to deal with the consequences of our own personal sin. In this fallen world, even beautiful things have flaws or negative attributes. Roses are beautiful, but they have thorns. Bees make sweet honey, but they will sting you. Gnats will show up at every barbecue with a dedicated mission to irritate everyone present. The first sign of life for a cute little baby is a cry, not laughter. It seems like everything good to us is bad for us. Pork ribs raise our blood pressure and elevate our cholesterol levels. Our favorite desserts send our A1c through the roof. We have to monitor our salt intake as we eat potato chips and other dry snacks. There are sicknesses, diseases, and plagues. Many of these plagues have literally altered the course of history. We are tired of Covid19, but Covid19 is surely not tired of us.

In this fallen world we see talented people who are very tainted. David was multi-talented, but he was tainted. He took another man's wife and had him killed. This was done after he wrote, "The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want." Abraham was faithful, but he was flawed. He lied and said his wife was his sister to avoid conflict with the rules of the land. He did this not once but twice. We will not even delve in to Hagar and Ishmael.

The point is, in this fallen world there is a constant struggle to achieve goals and maintain godly character traits. This is one of the things that separate humans from the other livings species.
It is like chasing the mythical pot of gold at the end of the world. The visible end of the world, supposedly, is the horizon and we can never reach it, although we keep trying. As

we advance toward the horizon, the horizon also advances and moves farther away. The pot of gold under the rainbow does the same thing.

Exposition

1. The Grace To Forget.
("Forgetting Those Things Which Are Behind.")
(Let It Go, So You Can Grow!)

2. The Grace To Concentrate (Focus).
("This One Thing I Do.")
(To Concentrate You Have To Eliminate.)

3. The Grace To Persevere.
("I Press Toward The Mark For The Prize.")
(You Must Have Thick Skin To Win.)

Closing Thoughts

Paul knew he had not arrived, but he was on his way. Aren't you glad there is grace for imperfect people like you and me? We all can identify with the lyrics of this hymn: "tis grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

Related Scripture

2nd Corinthians 12:9

Theological/Linguistic Note

The Greek word for apprehend is "*katalambano*." It is Strong's reference number 2638. It means "to lay hold of." Literally, it means to take possession of something, or to get your hands securely on an object. Metaphorically, it means to understand a concept or principle. Paul is saying, "I don't have my hands on the trophy yet, but I am running the race as hard as I can. I am running to win the trophy."