

Remembering Rightly and Running Hard

Sept. 8, 2019

To KNOW Christ and one another more deeply,
To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
- CG Mission Statement

Worship: Ephesians 4:2-5

(Here is a psalm/song to help your group as you worship)

Practice lectio divina (sacred reading) by attentively reading Ephesians 4:2-5 aloud several times. Enter into a time of worship through prayer by using a word or a phrase from the passage.

Icebreaker

Share a goal that you have worked really hard to achieve. Share about your experience reaching that goal.

Text for Discussion: Philippians 3:7-16

Turn in your Bibles and read this passage aloud together.

Aid for Discussion: Sermon Summary

“How are you?” Why does such a penetrating question often lead to surface level conversation? Maybe it shouldn't be a surprise. We rarely ask it of ourselves, honestly considering the state of our own heart. The same is true within the church. There exists a gap between what we want and where we find ourselves – between what we say we believe and what we are experiencing.

This level of self-awareness is tough. Each of us carries a broken heart yearning for love, safety and belonging. We try to meet these needs in all sorts of unhealthy ways because we fail to grasp that we are completely known and completely forgiven in Christ (Phil 3:12-14). As Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, we need *“to understand that perfection is not a reality but an intention, that such peace as we know in this life is never purely the peace of achievement ...but the serenity of being completely known and all forgiven. This does not destroy our ardor or our moral responsibility. On the contrary, this is what protects us from a new and more terrible pride – the intolerable pretension of saints who have forgotten that they are sinners.”*

We must press on to internalize this, deeper and deeper. Not because this makes us a Christian. The Good News is not that we can justify our lives by climbing our way to God. We haven't taken hold of God; He has taken hold of us, uniting His life to ours in Jesus.

Through this union with Christ, we are seen as pure and righteous and beautiful. And because we belong to God, the gap between what we say we believe and what we're experiencing no longer paralyzes us in shame and guilt. With clear eyes, we can push forward in the truth that we are loved and safe as God's completely known and forgiven children.

God knows we don't feel free and unburdened. That's why He urges us to press on. As we do, we must deliberately set aside whatever hinders our moving forward. By holding on to shame, guilt, regret and past mistakes, we forget what Christ has already died for. By clinging to our accomplishments and even our goodness, we forget Christ's righteousness. For we cannot rest in Christ if our confidence rests in ourselves.

This gap exists in each of us. The question is: Can we admit it? If only we could see where we are headed! Then we could finally run hard and free with our hearts wide open. Because Jesus has declared us whole, holy and pure in the gospel. And so we pray to become more and more whom God has already proclaimed us to be, pressing on to know the One who already knows us completely.

Guiding Question of the Week

(This question is intended as a target for the whole conversation. Do not ask for responses now. It will be repeated later in the study.)

What goal does Paul “press on” toward and why?

Questions for Discussion

(Remember it is better to wrestle deeply with two good questions than gloss over many. Sub-bullets are intended for potential follow-up.)

- Compare Philippians 3:12 in the three different translations below and answer the question - What goal does Paul "press on" toward and why?
 - NIV - Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.
 - ESV - 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.
 - NASB - Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.
- What does this gap look like in your own life between the person you are and the person that you want to be?
 - How are you? What is the experience of your heart?
- What did Paul mean when he said, "Jesus Christ has made me his own"? (see v.12 again)
 - Do you identify with this statement? Explain your answer and the impact it has in your life.
- If it's not possible to become perfect in this world, what is Paul's goal, what is he straining toward? (see vv. 7-11)
 - What kinds of things might a person do to press on toward the goal of the upward call? (v. 13)
 - Why do you think most of us don't have the same approach to our relationship with God as athletes do to their sport?
 - How can being in community help us press on?
- Does how well you run, how hard you try, or how well you perform make you a Christian or more loved by God?
 - How is this counterfeit to the good news that we are fully known and completely forgiven?
- What does it look like to “forget what lies behind and strain toward what lies ahead”? (v.13)
 - What in your life might be inhibiting you from running forward?
- Contrast and comment on these 2 statements: 1) Run, so that you might be loved. 2) You are loved, now run.
 - When did God take hold of you and make you his own?
 - What would it look like to run with eyes looking forward to the prize?
 - What encouragement do you receive from Phil 3:15?

Prayer

The best news about the gospel is that we are fully known and completely forgiven. We can speak to God like we would speak to our most trusted friend. Pray your prayer requests rather than telling them during group prayer this week. Tell him what you are grateful and hopeful for as well as praying for concerns and needs.

Experiment of the Month

(A suggestion for engagement in following the way of Jesus this week)

What would happen if we “press on toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” together as a community group? What would it look like? How would it affect us personally? our community group? our neighborhood? our city? Brainstorm some thoughts and ideas, share some “lightbulbs” that might have come on. Pray and come up with a missional plan to better love God and bless people in our spheres of influence.