

Coach House Church BEACONS

THE ART OF PRESSING ON

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Do you start things enthusiastically and then get bored and bogged down with the details? I'm a great project starter, or even better, a project 'imager'. It's all so great in my mind but when I get down to doing it, indifference sets in because the project never lives up to the ideal. Shelves on the wall, artwork on my desk and stories on the bookshelf have all met the same fate. They never get finished. Even so, life is full of stories about people who don't quit – and miles down the line finally acquire or achieve what they want after perseverance, suffering and hard work. Think of Gandhi seeking independence, Mandela languishing in prison for many years, or Wilberforce fighting for the end of slavery. What makes us see things through from their inception all the way to completion? What attitudes need to be in place?

Artwork, stories and shelves are trivial. They get fed through our prioritisation machine and come out the other end at the bottom of the pile. The food shop comes first, or seeing a friend who's just popped over. There are more pressing needs and more pressing reasons not to do them. When it comes to the bigger three examples above – resilience is key. The ability to face setbacks but to keep on going anyway. But guess what? Reasons and motives remain king as far as we are concerned – whether it's gaining independence, stopping Apartheid in South Africa, ending slavery – or perhaps for us – starting out a new career path – we need compelling reasons and resilience to keep going.

The apostle Paul shows us the dynamics of persevering in our faith in Philippians chapter 3:12-14. I want to focus on verse 13, but will read the rest for context. Here it is: **10** *I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,* **11** *and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.* **12** *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.* **13** *Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting*

what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Let's briefly summarise . So, V10-11 - **Paul's goal** – knowing Christ deeply and all the way through to resurrection. Previous verses show that a key part of knowing Christ is relying on his righteousness to save us, and not our own righteous credentials, however good they might be.

Verse 12 - **Paul's journey**. He's not obtained everything yet, but he's on track to know Jesus more and one day be resurrected with him. Paul's journey is in motion like a train on a set track, which, if followed without derailment, will certainly lead to its intended destination – knowing Christ holistically and being resurrected with him. He presses on to 'take hold of' these things, because that's why Christ turned his life around and took hold of him in the first place.

Verse 13 – **Paul's attitude**. He admits he's not yet reached his goal, but he does two things in order to reach it. 1. Forgets what lies behind and 2. Strains forwards to the goal.

Verse 14 – **Paul's call**. This fits together what Paul is saying in the light of God's calling.

Let's take a look at what it means to be forgetting the past and straining forwards towards the goal. How can we do it and why do we need to do it? Forgetting the past and moving on is logical...but often very tough.

The imagery of straining ahead towards a goal is drawn from athletics. Imagine a runner totally focused on the finish line ahead of him, leaning his whole body forwards to press through the finishing tape to complete the race, as fast and best as possible. If he tripped up a little earlier in the race, so what? The only logical answer is to press on. Can you imagine a marathon runner tripping up 2 miles into the race and then calling it quits and heading home, when he still has 24 more miles to run? Of course not, he gets up and keeps going. Paul encourages to press on and forget the past in just this way.

Let's look at 'forgetting'. To understand why Paul wants to forget the past, we need to remember the goal he is aiming for – To know Christ fully and obtain resurrection from the dead. Dwelling on his past sins and failures will not help him to achieve this goal because he has already been forgiven.

We often die by our failures and live by our successes. Paul wants us to stop thinking about what we have and haven't done and look at Jesus instead – by faith we know that he forgives our past sins, by faith we know that he's the one who makes us right with God.

Let's look at 'pressing on'. Again, let's view it in light of the central aim - To know Christ fully and obtain resurrection from the dead. This means that success is defined by an ever expanding faith in Jesus and relying on him more. That is what we should be pressing on to do. It is not a specific set of righteous things to tick off your list: convert this many people, lead this talk, read the Bible for this amount per day etc. Following Jesus will lead to many good and righteous attitudes and actions, but pressing on to know Christ comes first.

So, why should we press on to know Christ? The short answer is that faith in Christ means trusting him to change us, as well as to save us. What's so good about that? If we pin our hopes on being righteous in life and not failing God – we are going to end up miserable or delusional.

We can see that God lifts the burden of all that from our shoulders and promises to change us for real, genuine good. He will never fail us. At the beginning of the letter to the Philippians in 1:6 it tells us *"...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* Because we know that we're in safe hands, we can persevere when we fail and hold our successes lightly and humbly. We are free from the burden of having to be so much. We can keep running the race because God will help us every step of the way to the finish line. That's good news for all of us.

How do we begin to live like this?

1. Negatively, we stop ruminating on our failures and successes so that they determine our worth.
2. Positively, we replace it by reflecting on the magnitude of what God has done for us – a good place to begin doing this is looking at Philippians chapter 3.
3. Remember, God is there for the long haul – he won't ever abandon us, however slow change seems, he is with us and will help us along at every turn.

Hang in there, and keep running.



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