

GROWTH GROUPS
WEEK 3
WEEK OF OCT 4



Growth Group Fall 2020

Pressing On

Week 3 – October 4, 2020 - Philippians 3:7-14

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at a church. In this time of Corona19 and “social distancing” please don’t meet in person, but do continue to check in with each other. If your growth group would like to meet online or if you are aware of needs that the church can help fill, please let us know at connect@ljpres.org. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

Setting the Context

The passage follows Paul’s recognition that he is, by all standards, the perfect Jewish man. He was circumcised on the 8th day, he belongs to the right family, he is a Pharisee, he has completely followed the law and if judged by the law would be seen as completely righteous (see Philippians 3:4b-6). However, all of these “achievements” he counts as nothing when held next to Christ. In verses 7-14 we see the true heart of Paul’s theology: union with Christ.

Paul begins this section by writing that all things are “worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ my Lord” (v. 8). All of these accomplishments were worth nothing, because they ultimately did not bring him to Christ. His attempts to “gain” salvation were thwarted by the ever pervasive reality of sin. He could never act in a way, or follow the laws close enough, to have an assurance of salvation. While Paul never spoke out against the law, he did recognize that humans would never be able to keep it.

So where does salvation come from? If the law cannot save us and can only serve as a mirror to reflect back our shortcomings, where is our hope? Salvation and hope must be based in the person of Jesus Christ. It is only then that we can stop trying to earn our salvation and instead live into our salvation.

Paul writes that living into our salvation is to first choose Christ and second to experience transformation. The first choice is an active step towards following Christ daily. In doing this we choose to leave behind our achievements, our accolades, even our own selves. The second step is the successive and progressive transformation that happens when we follow Christ. Slowly our morals, our priorities, and our lives become increasingly united to the person of Jesus Christ.

Paul concludes this section by comparing the Christian life to the life on an Olympian. This metaphor would have been received well by the people of Philippi, as the Greek athletic games were a central part of society. In the same way that the games were an end goal for these athletes, union with Christ was the end goal for Paul. Both athletes and believers must leave what is behind them and charge full force ahead towards the finish line. We cannot follow Jesus if we are still holding onto our past, in the same way that an athlete cannot run the race if they are still holding onto their training weights.



Exploring the Text

Read Philippians 3:7-14

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in[a] Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 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.

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) Describe a time where you persevered to finish a project. How did it feel when the goal was completed?
- 2) Philippians 3:4b-6 lists Paul's credentials and they are quite impressive. Did Paul gain anything with those credentials? What happened in his life that made him now see them as "loss" and "garbage?"
- 3) Verse 9 talks about being "found in" Christ? What do you think Paul means by that? How is this related to being righteous?
- 4) Have you ever had to give up something because of your relationship with Jesus? What was that experience like?
- 5) The apostle Paul seems to walk a fairly "fine line" between grace and works as he writes this chapter. In his sermon, Pastor Paul shared the following quote from Dallas Willard. Grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning. What does this quote mean to you as it relates to your faith?
- 6) In Hebrews 12:1-2 we read, "*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" What does it mean that Jesus is both the pioneer and perfecter of our faith? How does this help us with the idea of perseverance?
- 7) Who has been in the stands cheering you on as you have run the race? Who has helped you to persevere and "press on" through the difficult times?
- 8) Is there a place in your life where you are growing weary, where it is hard to persevere? How can people in your growth group be praying for you and encouraging you?