

“Press On” (Philippians 3:12-21)

Joyful Unity in the Gospel

Zionsville Fellowship | Derek Joseph | July 26, 2026

Let me pray and we'll get started.

Oh great God.

You've laid hold of us.

You've justified us.

You will clothe us with immortality and glory.

So help us press on now.

and tomorrow.

and until we see Jesus.

in Him we pray, Amen.

The text for the teaching today is Phil 3:12-21.

In Phil 3:12-21, God compares the Christian life to a race.

A long race.

You ever been on a long run or a race?

Imagine you're in the middle of one.

You're out of breath.

You're lightheaded.

You have to keep wiping sweat off your eyes.

You're feeling it in your knees, your ankles.

You can't see the finish line.

you don't even know how far away it is.

Does your spiritual life ever feel like that?

Mine does

Then a friend or a coach shouts across other runners to you -

What do you need him to say?

God gives us two words in this text.

Press on. (x2)

Push. Go.

Strive. Strain.

Press on.

That's the point of Phil 3:12-21.

We can see that because Paul wrote about how he pressed on.

Then, he told the Philippians to imitate his pressing on.

And then he gave them reasons to press on.

Pressing on was Paul's point.

And that's God's point for us today

Press on.

I want to answer three questions.

1. First, how did Paul press on?
2. Second, how can we press on?
3. Third, why should we press on?

Let's answer the first question.

How did Paul press on?

This is important because pressing on is hard.

We need motivation.

We need an example.

We need to know what it looks like.

I lift weights.

Don't act surprised.

if I'm about to do some heavy squats, I'll probably open YouTube

I'll probably watch some huge guy squat,

Then I'll probably turn on some 80's hard rock and grind!

We're told to press on

And Paul's giving us motivation and an example.

So how did Paul press on?

First, by reminding himself he hadn't made it.

He still had a ways to go.

He wasn't perfect.

v. 12 *not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect...*

v. 13 *I do not consider that I have made it my own.*

Paul knew he hadn't made it.

This man spent years in 27 different foreign places to proclaim the gospel.

This man preached in Philippi,

the result was getting dragged to the judges.

He was stripped and flogged raw and bloody

they locked his feet in stocks.

if he tried to lay down it was on his tattered back in a waste-stained hole.

Paul did this because he loved God.

He pressed on because he knew he hadn't made it.

Paul gave up home.

Family. Friends.

Security. Money.

Why?

Because he loved God and loved people.

And he recalled this:

not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect...

Paul knew he hadn't really given everything up like Jesus did.

He didn't love God like Jesus did.

and he wasn't glorified like Jesus was.

Paul still got distracted by things in this world.

He still liked other stuff more than God.

He still probably had flashes of anger. Or lust.

Or covetousness. Or discontentment.

Or complaining.

Paul reminded himself he fell way short of Jesus' perfection.

he hadn't made it.

Why?

to press on.

Here's a second way Paul pressed on.

He expected it to hurt.

He expected straining.

Difficulty. Pain.

That's why he used the term 'press on.'

That's why he said this

v. 13

straining forward to what lies ahead.

Straining. Pressing.

He was pressing on while writing this.

He wrote while spending two years on house arrest.

Two years.

Chained to a guard.

Not able to leave a room.

He had to depend on people to bring him any food or clothes.

Hungry and thirsty and cold.

And what was he doing?

Writing the bible!

Giving thanks constantly for God saving other people.

praying for other people to know God better.

He even sent the people taking care of him to go care for the Philippians instead.

He wept- but not because of his suffering

about false teachers who were opposing God!

So a second way Paul pressed on was to remember pressing on is hard.

It's Straining, effort.

Paul remembered the Christian life isn't a fluffy mattress; it's a hard floor.

Here's a third way Paul pressed on.

He thought about how God rescued him.

He thought about how Jesus grabbed him.

v 12

because Christ Jesus has made me his own

he calls what happened the call of God - v 14

the upward call of God in Christ Jesus

Paul remembered how God saved him.

That's how he pressed on.

How did God save Paul?

Jesus didn't come to Paul and say - hey, do you want to try believing me?

Or, here's some evidence, you should look at it and be objective.

No, Paul was traveling.

He was going to arrest Christians.

Hopefully get them executed.

But then this happened -

Acts 9:3

suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

Paul fell to the ground.

He saw the glory of the risen Lord

The God man told him

rise up and enter the city and it will be told you what you must do

Jesus didn't ask for Paul's permission.

He didn't woo him.

He didn't appeal to his objectivity.

Or his felt needs.

Jesus tore the blinders off Paul's eyes and made him see.

He did surgery on Paul's soul without Paul signing a consent form.

He took out Paul's dead heart and replaced it with a living one.

Then, Jesus gave Paul this status -righteous.

Jesus gave Paul adoption - ownership of the new creation.

Jesus gave Paul his Spirit - his own presence.

Jesus gave Paul eternal life

Paul pressed on by thinking about this.

How Jesus made him his own.

How Jesus made him see.

Here's a last way Paul pressed on.

He didn't dwell on past success.

Or past immorality

v 13 -

forgetting what lies behind...

You're running a race

Do you press on by thinking about how you did on the first mile?

No - you remember the finish line.

That's how Paul pressed on.

He didn't think about what he'd left.

He had been very smart. educated.

Very popular. influential. respected

he was a good person.

he also used to be anti-God.

He had spoken against Jesus.

He had abetted murder.

But he didn't dwell on any of that.

He pressed on.

He knew what the finish line was.

Glory. Resurrection.

The face of the Savior himself.

So he pressed on.

How did Paul press on?

He remembered he hadn't made it.

He embraced the pain.

He thought about how Jesus rescued him
He didn't dwell on the past.

That's how Paul pressed on.

That's our model.

That's our motivator.

But it raises our second question.

Here it is

the 2nd question

How can we press on? (x2)

Some of us might be thinking - Paul was an apostle.

He was in the 1st century.

My situation is a little different.

But God says imitate Paul.

So how can we press on?

God gives us three ways to press on.

Think like Paul.

Don't coast.

Imitate others. (x2)

First, God tells us to think like Paul

v. 15

Let those of us who are mature think this way

We've got to think like Paul.

Paul knew he wasn't like Jesus yet.

He knew he had to grow.

He knew he still had work to do.
Gospel to get out.
Sin to put to death.

God says think like that.
Be discontent with yourself.
exactly what the world tells us not to think.
But God tells us to remember we haven't made it.
We're not like Jesus yet.

We've still got a lot of work to do.
The news about Jesus to get to dying people.
get better at obeying God like Jesus did
God says think like that.

We press on by thinking about how we haven't made it.

Here's another thing God tells us to think
One day we'll be done pressing on.
we'll love perfectly like Jesus.
we'll be raised with Jesus.

Every physical pain will be gone.
Every sinful desire eradicated
and we'll be glorified - because Christ deserves it.

1 Cor. 15:51

we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed. ... this mortal must put on immortality.

We press on by thinking like Paul about our future.

We also need to think like Paul about the Christian life.

Believe it's pressing on. Striving.

It's not ease.

It's not standing still.

It's not a stroll; it's a run.

It is muscles aching, straining, uncomfortable.

God says think like that to press on.

Additionally, we press on by thinking like Paul about how God saved us.

God grabbed Paul.

Tore off his blinders, replaced his heart.

If you trust Christ it's because God acted.

If you're a Christian, here's what happened to you -

2 Cor. 4:6

For God, who said, "light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Have you seen the glory of the Lord Jesus?

Then that's because the God who said 'let there be light' made you see.

Or like Phil 1:29 says, God gave you faith as a gift.

Like Wesley wrote

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night.

thine eye diffused a quickening ray, I woke the dungeon flamed with light

And to quote a parody I once read

It's not

Amazing grace how strange the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost but turned around was blind but chose to see.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, it's not because you made a smart choice.

It's not because Jesus is a gentleman and you made a better choice than other people

It's because the God who created your body, soul, and will made you his own.

he made you alive.

And then Jesus gave you his own righteousness.

He gave you himself.

He will exalt you at the resurrection.

We press on by thinking like that.

And

v. 15

if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you

at some point.

Now, here's something for you to potentially do

You may wrestle with or not understand some of what Paul wrote here

I'd be happy to recommend you some books later

Also, I know the elders would be happy to talk.

Because to press on we've got to think like Paul

Now, here's a second way we can press on.

make sure you don't coast.

don't ease up.

don't slow down.

If you've ever run or done anything athletic you know you want to give up when it starts to hurt. slow down.

But you can't do that and press on.

v. 16

Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Don't coast. Don't slide.

Don't get lazy. Don't fall into easy routines.

Press on.

Remember when God first saved you?

Remember how much you devoured God's word?

Told others about him? Prayed?

It can be easy to do that when God first saves you.

Then the excitement wears off.

After you run a mile running is routine.

But to press on, we can't coast.

God is telling us - remember the stuff that you did when Christ took hold of you?

Don't stop. Don't coast

Press on.

Remember what you did and keep doing it!

Or return to doing it.

Now, here's another thing you might need to do.

You might need to think about the love you had at first

How you acted when you were first converted

Some of us might need to repent for coasting

And then start doing what we did during the first mile

That's the second way we press on.

Don't coast

Here's the third way we can press on.

We should imitate other people who do it.

God says watch people who press on like Paul did.

Imitate Paul; imitate his imitators.

v. 17

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

There are people around you and me imitating how Paul pressed on.

God says watch them.

Imitate them.

Church, I thank God for you and the examples so many of you are.

Some of you pray constantly like Paul.

Some of you constantly think about others like Paul.

Some of you are bold with the gospel like Paul.

Some of you help the poor like Paul.

Some of you want to go where the gospel is inaccessible like Paul.

Some of you are content like Paul

Some of you love outsiders like Paul

I thank God for you.

we need to look at people around us imitating Paul.

Here's another thing you could do to press on.

Think about this.

Who around you is pressing on in an area where you're not as much

Think of a name.

Thank God for that person

What do you need to do - change - to imitate him/her

Pray. And act

that's a third way we can press on.

Imitate Paul's imitators

So remember.

How can we press on?

Think like Paul. Don't coast. Imitate Paul's imitators. (x2)

We're not done yet,

but we did just cover the question - how can we press on

so is there anything we just covered that you need to decide to do?

then i'd encourage you to decide to do it now.

Here's our last question.

Why should we press on? (x2)

Pressing on is hard.

we need motivation.

We need to have a reason.

God gives us two reasons to press on

Here's the first reason

There's real danger. (x2)

That real danger is false teaching.

It exists.

False teachers exist.

They're enemies of your salvation.

They're enemies of God.

v. 18

For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Who is an enemy of the cross of Christ?

The beginning of chapter 3 talks about some of them.

The dogs. The evil workers. The mutilators.

Who opposes Christ's cross?

Anyone who teaches that justification before God is by anything but faith alone,
anyone who says it's based on anything but Christ's works alone.
anyone who says our status before God is in any way based on our goodness

The cross of Christ says everyone who trusts Jesus will be saved.

And the basis for eternal life is Jesus' obedience.

Period.

Anyone who says anything different is an enemy of Christ's cross.

- it doesn't matter what religion it comes from -

In Galatians, Paul says God curses these people.

He says these people want to cut you off from Christ

- from God - from eternal life.

Enemies of the cross.

There's another way to be an enemy of the cross.

It's to teach that Jesus gives us our best life now.

To quote one rapper, if you're living your best life now, you're headed for hell.

Being an enemy of the cross means living for good stuff in this life instead of the next.

v. 19

with minds set on earthly things.

Living for this life instead of eternal life.

That means they don't sacrifice to obey Jesus.

They don't press on.

They relax.

They don't sacrifice their reputations or money or relationships

or jobs or emotions or complaining

or comfort or security to obey what God wrote.

Obedying Jesus requires some pain in life.

Pressing on.

To say it's doesn't is to be an enemy of Jesus

we need to press on because false teaching has a really bad ending. v. 19

whose end is destruction.

Destruction means being brought to total misery.

No hope.

No experience of anything good.

Forever.

Destruction in Rev 20:10 means this:

they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Paul wept over this

And it's a real danger for us

It's tempting to live for pleasure now

That's why we need to press on

God describes his enemies.

They're gluttons.

v. 19

their god is their belly.

Commentators say this is about gluttony.

Certainly the Hebrew word for gluttony couldn't mean eating too much, could it?

No, it does.

The Hebrew word means undisciplined or unrestrained eating.

Undisciplined or unrestrained.

In the ancient world, you had to plan for gluttony.

You couldn't just go to the pantry or the fridge.

You had to think about it. Plan it.

Enemies of the cross think more about hamburgers than heaven.

Their eating is undisciplined - unrestrained.

I thought about sharing some statistics about America.

But really, does anyone think that we don't live in a culture of gluttony?

Of eating without discipline and restraint?

Part of our problem is that we're in America.

Americans are radically wealthy compared to anyone in the history of the world.

We can get almost whatever and however much food we desire.

The false teachers had to plan for that.

We don't.

We can just walk to the kitchen

Or click DoorDash

Gluttony isn't just a danger to our coronary arteries

It's a danger to our souls

We need to see the real danger and press on

Let me ask you - do you need to do something in response to this?

Do not be ashamed to ask for help

I'd be surprised if anyone here, including myself, isn't tempted in this area

Our culture pulls us to live for the world now

but we all need to press on

The false teachers committed gluttony and bragged about sin

They boasted

v. 19

they glory in their shame.

I tricked him. I told her.

I got him back. I drank this much.

I ate this much

they glory in their shame.

Don't we want glory?

Praise? Approval?

For cleverness? For not being meek?

Sometimes for other sins?

To press on, we can't glory in shame.

We face a grave danger

False teachers. False teaching.

Enemies of the cross of Christ

we can be really tempted by what they teach

and how they live

This is a massive reason to press on.

Christ's enemies want to cut us off from him

They tempt us. entice us. Seduce us.

But we need to press on.

Enemies of the cross

That's one reason to press on.

Pause for a second.

Are you tempted by any of this false teachings?

Jesus said if something's leading you to sin, cut it off.

Pressing on for you might mean taking drastic action

Do you have a temptation where you need to take drastic action?

We've got to press on because there's real danger.

Here's a second reason to press on.

our future.

Our future is a reason to press on.

Listen. We belong with God.

We will be rescued from every pain.

We will see the Lord we love.

We will get the glory that he earned.

v. 20

For our citizenship is in heaven

Christian, we don't belong here.

We belong in heaven.

That is home. This is not.

So we should press on.

One day soon, Jesus will rescue us from every pain on this planet.

Every injury. Every injustice.

Every scary thing. Every deprivation.

Every loneliness. Every disappointment.

Everything bad.

We wait for him.

v. 20

from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why we should press on.

And get this

When Jesus appears, we'll be like him.

We'll look like the one the angels serve.

We'll be as immortal as Jesus.

We'll own everything in heaven and earth because it's his.

v. 21

he will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

We will be glorious like the Lord himself is glorious.

So we press on.

But how is that even possible?

Have you seen us?

Listen. Jesus himself can do it - and will.

by his complete power over everything

v. 21

by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

To make subject means to make submit.

To make everything conform to his will.

To make everything obey him

We already saw in Philippians when this will happen.

2:10-11

at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord....

The Lord Jesus' power will make it happen.

That same power will raise you from the dead.

That same power will put a crown that Jesus earned on your head

And get this.

That same power will make you - for the first time -
actually love the Lord with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.
Will make you delight in God fully.
will make you see the face of Jesus, the Lord God almighty, the Savior.

That's a reason press on.

Remember our question was why should we press on.

Here are the two reasons

First reason: because false teaching opposes us

Second reason:

because

our citizenship is in heaven

from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

he will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Praise be to God

That's why we press on.

Let's review what we covered this morning.

We answered three questions

How did Paul press on?

How can we press on?

Why should we press on?

We talked about some steps to take in response.

Let me reiterate some suggestions.

It might help you to pick one thing and decide to do it.

We're supposed to think like Paul.

He taught a lot in this passage
about how God saves
about false teaching
about the future

Is there one thing you need to learn about so you can think more like him?
so you can press on?

God tells us not to coast.

Is there a behavior you've slacked on that you need to get back at?
Maybe ask someone else to pray for you about that

We're told to strain.

What's something the bible tells you to do that's hard?
That may cause you pain?
Will you decide to do it?

We're told to imitate how the godly press on?

What's a weakness you have?
Who's around you you could imitate?

We're warned about setting our minds on this world

what's something you need to confess to God?
it might really help to ask others for help

Like I said, these are all just suggestions.

But is there something you think - before God - you need to do today?
Something you need to commit to?

God is telling us - press on

Press on away from the world.
Press on towards the heaven where we belong

So let's do it.

Let's press on

Pray with me

Father,

Thank you that Jesus took hold of us.

for citizenship in heaven.

for glory with Christ

Cause us to press on.

To strain.

We pray because Christ died and rose for us

amen