

Pressing On
Philippians 3:12-14
Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – January 4, 2026

Introduction

- As we enter a new year, the Scriptures give us a foundation to build this year on that is far stronger than willpower, goal setting, or human optimism. God invites us into a holy realism, full of hope, anchored not in who we were yesterday, nor in what we imagine tomorrow will bring, but in who Christ is today.
- The verses from Philippians 3:12-14 are not a slogan for the spiritually simple. It is not a motivational poster to inspire us to hang on our bathroom mirror, nor is it an embroidered verse to hang above a doorway. It is the hard-won confession of a man in chains, whose hope was not shaken by circumstance. It is an anthem of gritty faith, resilient endurance, and unshakable confidence in Christ. These verses should not hang from our hearts, but be treasured in our hearts, to guide us, and inspire us, to remind us of the eternal truth that never changes.
- Let's turn together to take a look again at a passage that will be familiar to most of us, that deserves a longer look as we move into this new year. Please turn to Philippians 3:12 (page 1013).

Philippians 3:12-14 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. 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.

- Paul is in prison when he writes this. Suffering. Misrepresented. Uncertain of his future. And yet, instead of despair, instead of bitterness or hopeless resignation, he speaks with conviction and joy. His honesty pierces us, his hope steadies us, and his resolve calls us forward.
- As the new year begins, I want to challenge us to embrace and move forward in these four realities:
 1. **Humble Realism** – “I have not arrived.”
 2. **Gospel Confidence** – “Because Christ Jesus has made me His own.”
 3. **Singular Focus** – “This one thing I do.”
 4. **Pressing On** – “I press on.”

Each one shapes how we look backward, what we carry forward, and how we move ahead.

Embrace Humble Realism

Philippians 3:12a NIV

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal.

- Paul confesses that he is not spiritually complete. The apostle of grace, the missionary theologian, the one who wrote much of our New Testament, even he says, “I haven’t arrived.” This humility is theologically rich and based on the reality of who he is compared to the reality of who he will become.
- Scripture teaches that we live in the “already” and the “not yet.”

- **Already justified (Rom 5:1), but not yet glorified (Rom 8:30).**
- **Already new creations (2 Cor 5:17), but not yet fully conformed to Christ's image (Rom 8:29).**
- **Already indwelt by the Spirit (1 Cor 6:19), but not yet perfected in holiness (Heb 12:10-11).**
- Paul's realism dismantles both arrogance and despair. Arrogance says, "I've arrived. I'm mature. I'm fine." And despair whispers, "I'll never change. I'm hopeless. Why try?" Paul denies both.
- His confession sets us free from the tyranny of perfectionism. Psychology consistently observes that the pursuit of flawlessness often becomes self-punishing, producing anxiety, shame, compulsiveness, and paralysis. Some of you really struggle with this. But spiritual growth begins not with denial, nor with despair, but with truth. The truth is that we are people in process, so embrace the process.
- His confession also helps us with the trap of hopelessness, which causes us to give up, give in, or never move forward.
- Here is the truth: **We are unfinished people, redeemed by an unfailing Savior.** Scripture tells us to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you." (Phil 2:12-13). Growth is necessary because Christ is at work in us, and growth is only possible because God is working in us. He is the One who is working when we are working. What an incredible partnership, where we get His power, and He gets the glory.

Stand with Gospel Confidence

Philippians 3:12b NIV

But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

- Here is the power source of Christian perseverance. We press on *because* Christ has already taken hold of us. Sanctification is not the ladder we climb to gain God's approval. It is the journey we walk because His grace has already claimed us, and He walks beside us and His Spirit lives within us.
- Isaiah prophesied the same reality that has existed throughout eternity, saying, "**Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine**" (Isaiah 43:1). Society measures worth by production, career, social approval, income, or image. Sociologists, those who study groups of people, have found that a culture fixated on comparison produces anxiety, inferiority, and insecurity in people.
- But the gospel proclaims a stronger identity: *Christ Jesus has made you His own*. Not by your merit. Not by your performance. But by His grace (Eph 2:8-9). By His choice. What He calls you is what you are, regardless of what society or even what you say about yourself. What He calls a thing is what a thing is. And what He calls a person is what that person is. And what He calls you to do, you can do because He is giving you the grace and power to do it.
- Paul's striving does not come from doubt about God's love, but from confidence in it. He runs hard not to earn Christ's embrace but because he already lives within it. God will not leave you or forsake you; He will always encourage you, equip you, and be with you every step of your life.
- The truth is that people without purpose wither. But the Christian has a goal so profound that all other purposes pale in comparison. Christ Himself is our prize (Phil 3:8). Christ Himself is our life (Phil 1:21). Christ Himself is our reward (Rev 22:12). We press on because Christ first pursued us. In Him we have the greatest purpose—to know Him and to make Him known. In

Christ, you always have purpose, because He is our worth and gives us worth. You have work to do, the “good things” He has prepared for you to do (Eph 2:10). You always have purpose, so ask God to show you the good things that He has prepared for you to do, and then do them.

- Ultimately, the “doing” is less about the task you are doing but more about the person you are becoming.

Have a Singular Focus

Philippians 3:13 NIV

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,

- The Christian life is not meant to be scattered, distracted, or unfocused. Paul says, “one thing.” The language is athletic, heart-pounding, muscles-burning, leaning forward toward a finish line. Hebrews 12:1-2 uses the same type of language, “let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”
- What is Paul’s “one thing”? “Forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what is ahead.” Paul is not erasing memory. Scripture repeatedly calls us to remember God’s faithfulness (Deut 8:11-14). But what Paul is doing is *unhooking* himself from things in his past that hold and hinder him from moving forward in his present. Things that may have bound him, defined him, or disqualified him for who God called him to be and what God called him to do.
- *Many are chained to yesterday.*
 - Some to regret or sin that Christ has already forgiven.
 - Some to wounds that Christ longs to heal.
 - Some to achievements that feel safer to cling to than obedience today.
- Paul releases both failure and success. He will not let memory become a master. Growth demands a forward posture. We cannot rewrite yesterday, but we can shape what tomorrow becomes by the choices we make today. Here are some scriptural truths that will help you:
 - Christ already carried our sins to the cross (1 Pet 2:24).
 - The Spirit already empowers us for new obedience (Rom 8:11).
 - The Father already delights in His children (Zeph 3:17).

So, we strain forward, prayerfully, repentantly, joyfully. Moving with all our might, pressing on toward the goal.

Press on Toward the Goal

Philippians 3:14 NIV

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

- So, what’s this goal? Paul’s “goal” is not a generalized spirituality or generalized morality. It is not inner peace disconnected from God. The goal is to hit the “tape” at the end of your life. This is the finish line of your life. He is going to run as fast as he can all the way to the finish line of his life, like a sprinter running with everything he has.
- And what is the prize? The prize is salvation, eternal life, eternal reward, Christ Jesus Himself in a new heaven and new earth forever. This is what Paul is aiming at. This is what Paul is running toward. This is the call we all have; we are running to the end of our lives, but the end

of our lives is just the beginning. We have been called heavenward; this call has been extended to us by God Himself.

- This is why we run. This is why we endure. This is why we do not lose heart. This is why we press on. This is what we are living for. To receive the “well done,” is orienting our lives to following Jesus and measuring success as God measures it. He measures success by asking us if we were obedient to follow Him and His plan for our lives, and He looks for Christ's likeness in us, that is, family resemblance to our “older brother,” which is Christ Himself.

Practical Application for a New Year

- *Press on in Scripture.* Renew your mind (Rom 12:2). Let the Word dwell richly (Col. 3:16). Your heart will follow what your mind feeds on. Get on a regular Bible reading program.
- *Press on in Prayer.* Prayer is not a Christian accessory. It is the oxygen of spiritual life. This year, deepen private prayer, intercession, thanksgiving, and dependence. Press on to make it your own.
- *Press on in Repentance.* We will stumble, fail, and sin. But repentance is not humiliation; it is liberation. Christ lifts us, forgives us, and strengthens us. Forget what lies behind. Receive cleansing (1 John 1:9). Don't give up; get up and move forward.
- *Press on in Community.* We run better together. Encourage, confess, pray, serve, forgive. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”
- *Press on in Obedience.* If Jesus calls us to it, He will help us through it. Every command is a reflection of His heart and His wisdom (John 14:15). Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”
- *Press on in Hope.* Whatever this year brings, joy or sorrow, prosperity or suffering, Christ remains enough, sovereign, with you, and for you. He will see you through. He will never leave you or forsake you (Heb 13:5).

Conclusion

- As this year begins, let Paul's words become our own. We have not arrived, but Christ Jesus has made us His own. Therefore, we forget what lies behind. We strain toward what lies ahead. *We press on.*
- When we fall, He will lift us. When we fear, He will calm us. When we doubt, His Word will steady us. When we grow weary, His Spirit will renew us. The God who began a good work in you will bring it to completion (Phil 1:6). So, *Press on. Press in. Press forward.* Christ is worth it. Christ is with you. Christ is your prize.

Our prayer team is available to pray with you after the service, near the “prayer” sign at the front of the sanctuary, and in the prayer room next to the offices. Also, you can send your prayer request to prayer@crosspointrockford.com

Questions for Growth Groups

1. Read Philippians 3:12-14. What part of Paul's mindset challenges or encourages you most as you enter a new year?
2. Paul recognizes that he has "not already obtained" full maturity. Where do you see areas of needed growth in your own life, and how does knowing that God is actively working in you (Phil 2:12-13) bring both humility and hope?
3. "Christ Jesus has made me His own." How does resting in this identity change your motivation for spiritual growth, repentance, or obedience?
4. Paul speaks of "forgetting what lies behind." What past failures, wounds, patterns, or even successes might be holding you back spiritually? What would it look like to release those to Christ?
5. "Straining toward what is ahead." What specific disciplines, steps of obedience, or spiritual focus do you sense the Holy Spirit calling you to pursue this year?
6. Paul presses on toward "the goal . . . the prize." How can you cultivate a deeper longing for Christ as your ultimate prize and not become distracted by lesser goals?
7. Of the practical applications from the message—Scripture, prayer, repentance, community, obedience, hope—which one is God inviting you to press into most intentionally, and how can your group help you walk it out?