

Joining Jesus' Story
Week 9: Estimated Time of Arrival

We are making our way through the book of Philippians. In this book Paul, the writer, is asking us to join Jesus' story. We are to **emulate the attitudes** that Jesus had. **Another way to describe joining Jesus' story is how we make a transition in how we view our lives.** It's not the story of **Bill, starring Bill**, including Jesus. That's Christian in name. **What if we viewed it this way?** It's the story of Jesus, starring Jesus, including Bill. **I jump into his story of sacrificing for others and he lives his life through me.**

We are continuing to challenge each other to these five opportunities to join Jesus' story.

1. Be here, whether that means in person or online. In person is best if you can, either in Beaverton or Midland. (sermons are on the website)
2. Read through this book, really it's a letter in one sitting.
3. Read it piece by piece as we teach through it.
4. Memorize **Philippians 2:6-11**, which is Paul's telling of Jesus' story, which is the center of this letter.
5. Join a Bridge Group in order to **discuss and reflect** on this letter with other people who also don't have all the answers.
6. Pick up and use your **Philippians Journal** as our gift to you.

This morning, we are reading 3:12-4:1. Last week, **Deb** took us through a section where Paul talks about giving up everything for Jesus.

Here's part of what she read...Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ ⁹ and become one with him...I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, ¹¹ so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! Philippians 3:8-9 & 11.

This sounds like Paul is almost bragging. Or he's **setting us up for failure by comparison.** How can mere mortals like us live up to all of that?

After all of that, Paul immediately says this...**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.** ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 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. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ **But our citizenship is in heaven,** and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

4 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, **stand firm** thus in the Lord, my beloved. Philippians 3:12-4:1 ESV

Paul wants to make sure that they **don't misunderstand what he means** when he says things like...

- "For his sake I have discarded everything else."
- "gain Christ ⁹ and become one with him."
- "experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead."
- "so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead."

If the letter stopped right before 3:12, the Philippians and those reading it ever after might fall for some...**Potential Misunderstandings.**

Here is one potential misunderstanding people then and people like us today could fall into. **1. Act as if you have arrived.**

"Are we there yet, how much longer?" That is what every parent has heard from the back seat of the family minivan. It's the request for an **estimated time of arrival.** It's so that we can pace ourselves. We know what kind of **stamina we will need.** We will know whether or not a meal break is needed or how many **restroom breaks** that might mean.

With **technology**, we have perfected the ETA.

In our culture, it is very important to know when you have arrived at the place or goal that you have planned toward. That degree will take four years, but if I change my major, it might be 4-1/2.

Paul wants to make sure there is **no misunderstanding that we have arrived** as followers of Jesus. **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.** ¹³ **Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.** V. 12-13

He is focused on the trip, not the place of arrival.

Paul says that, "paradoxically, only those who understand their lack of perfection (teteleiomai) have reached spiritual maturity (telios)." 194

Paul is warning us against a **false gospel**. Since I have been saved by grace and **there's nothing I can do to earn it** and there must not be anything **I can do to lose it**. Therefore, I am free in Christ. In other words I have arrived. I have **crossed the finish line** of the race. **This is a mutation of the gospel of grace and is a twisting of the idea of freedom in Christ.**

¹⁷ **Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.** 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.** ¹⁹ **Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.** V. 17-19

What is that all about? It's about Corinth. Paul ran into this problem with another new group of Christ followers in a city called **Corinth**. They felt like they had a **superior level of knowledge** and some had **power and money**. Therefore, that meant in their minds that they must be mature. In other words, they had arrived. **Paul wants to avoid this misunderstanding in Philippi and for us.**

Here's what had happened in Corinth...They were **getting drunk and stuffed** at the Lord's supper in the presence of the poor brothers and

sisters. "Since spiritual illumination and power were alone important indulgences in shameful sexual conduct was not only tolerated, but also celebrated as a sign of their spiritual freedom." (198) The problem is that these are all **social sins**. They destroy the unity that God has achieved for them. This is what Paul wants them to guard.

When you have arrived, you don't need to worry about how you are living. Sin issues aren't important because they really aren't sin anymore. **Those damage the progress of the gospel and the reputation of those who represent Jesus.**

Another problem with arriving is that it creates complacency. Any teaching that encourages complacency is not for Paul; he trusts God to finish what he has started, but wants to press forward to do his part in response to Jesus' grace.

Paul hopes to head off the same issues as he dealt with in the Corinthian church. They were focused on **knowledge, the Spirit, outward signs of power,** and spiritual perfection. **"Some of the Corinthians believed that spiritual maturity should be defined in terms of these elements alone and, flourishing the slogan, 'Everything is possible for me' (Doesn't that sound like today? If you can dream it, then it can happen) (6:12, 10:23),** neglected, such basic ethical requirements as loving one another, remaining sexually pure, and avoiding idolatry. The Corinthians may have appealed to Paul's claim that the Mosaic Law was obsolete as proof that their position was compatible with his gospel." 194

"The times have changed, the Mosaic law is no longer in force, and believers are united with Christ; but this does not mean that they have 'arrived' spiritually. Still less, does it mean that spirituality is divorced from behavior? The gospel reveals a pattern of conduct that believers must follow **as they await the final chapter in God's redemption of his fallen creation.**"

With this misunderstanding, some went the opposite direction from living the wildlife. Their context had teaching that the flesh is evil and all material things are below the spiritual realm. **That would lead some to deny good desires because the physical is not important, it really doesn't**

matter, **the mind and the spirit are what is real and important. We go from hedonism to legalism.**

My Dad had a group of friends who tended to look at their theology as right on the money. They viewed almost **all other churches as wrong** or, at best, not quite there. One morning over breakfast, my dad dropped a bombshell. He said, **"my theology changes."** They were shocked that my dad would **confess that he had not arrived** at perfect understanding about God and what the Bible teaches.

Paul wants us to understand that he's not talking about having arrived. He is pressing on. **He has a sense of urgency about him.** It's not panic, but more like now is the time. Acting like they have arrived causes **all kinds of problems.** They will tend to produce **pride.** That pride is really about **being in control. I can do whatever because I've arrived or I can suppress all my desires and control things that way.** The result of all of that is that it **puts the focus on me and not others, which stops the gospel from going out.**

It's the same for us. Acting like we have arrived is poison. **It stops growth, understanding, and our effectiveness in our culture. No one likes a person who thinks he's arrived.**

I remember a few years back that there was a particularly flamboyant **football player** who talked a lot and show boated on the field. One time he caught a pass and outran the defense. As he was heading across the goal line he began his celebration a little early by tossing the ball in the air. The camera caught that he had released the ball before crossing the goal line. His team was not awarded 6 points and he had the camera, as well as his coaches and teammates looking right at him. **We looked stupid when we think we have arrived.**

The second misunderstanding is focused on keeping a positive tension in place. If there's no tension in the **guitar string** then there is no music. If there's no tension in the **bowstring**, then the arrow won't fly. The misunderstanding comes when we don't keep... **2. Tension between what God has done and is doing.**

Let's look at verse 13-15 again. **But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 13b-15**

Paul is not referring to his life before meeting Jesus. He is not saying to forget about how he persecuted Christians, had them arrested, and even killed. That isn't what it means by "forgetting what lies behind." **He is talking about the things he has done thus far as a Christ follower and apostle.** This is all the churches he has planted, people he has introduced to Jesus, and all the miracles he has seen God do through his ministry.

Paul is reinforcing the idea that he has not yet arrived. The finish line was not when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus or when he did all those great things for the cause of the Gospel. The finish line is something out in front that he is moving toward.

Yes, we remember what God has done in order to celebrate as we press forward to see what he is doing now and will do in the future. **We celebrate what God had done through Cultivate and Beaverton,** but it's not time to put our feet up.

Have you ever talked to a Christian and it's as if all that was good happened in the past and now is worthless, a lost cause. Or someone who, when asked about what God has done, can only talk about **how he saved them back at summer camp** when he went forward to pray. **That was not the finish line, that was the starting line.**

Maturity does not only know that you haven't arrived, but it is expressed by being on mission. Living and loving like Jesus and making disciples. Maturity in our culture is **too closely tied to knowledge,** which is power. **A better barometer is "mission".**

Paul wants the Philippians and us to keep that tension between what he has done and what he is doing because that keeps us with a mission perspective that presses on. **It's this tension that propels us forward.**

The third misunderstanding that Paul wants us to avoid is particularly important for us today in our culture. Keep in mind that **any of these misunderstandings would derail the Philippian Church and will do the same for us today.** 3. Act as if you are trying to arrive.

If we haven't arrived and we are keeping the tension between what God has done and will do then pressing on is the goal, not arriving. The only arrival that matters is when we stand before him and he says, ``welcome good and faithful servant, enter into my rest". (Matthew 5:21-25) Before that point to goal is to press on.

Brandon Cook describes this idea in a really powerful little book called, *The False Promise of Discipleship*. In this book he describes why people have given up on the effort of discipleship or growing in Grace. The reason is that they set a goal or a finish line for what they wanted out of it. After all, this has to pay off, doesn't it?

He describes this as the human paradigm. This is where we have a goal in mind and then steps to get to it. This is really important in almost every other part of life, other than our relationship with God through Jesus.

Let's say your goal is to save your marriage, get your kids back to following Christ, see the church grow in number, be happier or more content, get over depression, have the right answers to all the important questions. Or even better, the mystical idea of maturity.

What happens if you don't get your marriage fixed, you kids straightened up, and you start feeling happier? Then the only conclusion is that this "Jesus thing" didn't work. And aiming toward a moving target like "maturity" will never bring a sense of accomplishment.

The Jesus paradigm is different. It is accepting that you are already in. If you have trusted your life to Jesus, the forgiveness of your sins, you have repented, believed, and are following him, then you are already in. You can't get any closer to Jesus than having him in you. This is about living in the new reality that I am loved, accepted and adopted by God. Now I'm not trying to get somewhere, I'm trying to abide, or rest in him so that he

can transform me and I can make the kingdom of God present for others.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, Philipians 2:12

Paul is not saying take steps toward a goal of perfection, or maturity or becoming closer to Jesus. Abide in Christ; allow him to transform you as you obey him.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. John 15:4 NLT

Again, the only arriving is when we stand before him and hear him say, "good and faithful servant." That's the finish line, so don't set up false finish lines that will cause you discouragement. Instead, put effort into abiding in Christ or positioning yourself to better hear his voice and see what he is doing in you and around you.

That's why we say over and over, "I am one in whom Christ dwells and I live in his unshakable Kingdom."

To avoid those misunderstandings that will derail us in our culture we must then do what Paul says...For a proper understanding...

Follow Paul and others who are mature. Find examples of people who are pressing on, not having arrived or are trying to arrive at some false finish line. People who know how to live in the new reality that they are already close to Jesus and know how to abide. These are the people who are being transformed and are on mission.

Remember, that maturity is not the same as knowledge. Knowledge can lead to pride or a sense of arriving. When someone knows they haven't arrived, but is joining Jesus' mission and being transformed by him, that's how to evaluate maturity. From this point on, we can replace the word maturity with on mission.

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. V. 17

Remember where your citizenship lies. Paul keeps repeating this over and over. It must be important. Actually, it's more than important, it is vital to their survival and ours.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. V.20-21

"I am one in whom Christ dwells and I live in his unshakable Kingdom." Do you feel like everything is shaking politically, socially, and racially, and that everything is simply out of control. Then maybe you're confused about your citizenship. We are citizens of Heaven or The Kingdom. That means that we are to be a part of God restoring his authority over all things. That means we are to be a part of God's kingdom being made present in all of those areas right now.

Remember that you have a calling.

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. V. 14 It is military language for one army pursuing another. 195

We are right back to pressing on, not having arrived or trying to arrive, and not focused on the rear view mirror looking at what God has done. **Being on mission means that we are allowing God to show us our calling.**

We want to point toward the idea that calling isn't just for people like pastors, it's for everyone who is following Jesus. Tammy is the person to come to for help understanding your calling. Also the Come and See Class that will take place at Beaverton in the spring is a part of this process

Steps to Joining Jesus' Story:

Am I acting like I've already crossed the finish line? Confession. Let's take some time right now to bring our confessions to God. Confession is agreeing with God about what he already knows about me. How am I acting like I've arrived, like accepting Jesus as my Lord and Savior was the finish line? Am I speaking in definitive terms about complicated political stuff as if I have the final answer? Am I acting as if I cannot learn something new about how God might be working in this world? Am I closed off to other people's experiences and stories because they are different from me? Take to the Lord what the Holy Spirit is making you conscious of.

What does it look like for me to "press on" today?

Preferably in the morning, but each day this week, I want you to read this verse and ask that question, "What does it look like for me to "press on" today? And then listen!

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Read this passage daily and then ask the question above.