

## **But One Thing I Do**

### **Introduction**

We heard last week that pondering Christ and treasuring the depth of who He is and His glory more is a good endeavor for the Christian. There will be more peace in hardships, more joy in life, less anxiousness and more love for people if we ponder or think more deeply about Jesus. Christian Barrett challenged us to ponder the truths of Christ and to apply the truths to our lives, and I hope this past week you gave gifts to those you love in light of the gospel and Jesus Christ – the greatest gift ever given to humanity. Do you ever ponder, (where) the gospel truth is leading you in your journey of life? Do you know where your life is headed?

The challenge before us today with the Philippians passage is to ponder the bedrock truth that the entire Christian life is about becoming who we are in Christ. The gospel reality is that those who are truly followers of Christ have been declared righteous by the Father as a gift based on the sacrifice of the Son on the cross, and all of life here as aliens and strangers, is a continuous journey to become holy and Christlike – and it needs to be our priority.

The one thing we must do as followers of Jesus is to reach forward on a journey of holiness -- of becoming more Christlike -- to live as Jesus challenged the disciples on the Mount of Beatitudes to live by seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness.

In today's passage Paul says in verse 13: but one thing I do – a phrase he doesn't use anywhere else in his letters. So, the challenge of the Word to this faith family as we close out 2025 and enter into a new year is: will you say "But one thing I do in 2026 is forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead."

We've been studying 1 Corinthians since the Fall, and the problem at the Corinthian church, which we've been focused on for some weeks now, is that "holy" or "Christlike" would not be the first words that come to mind in describing that church. What was going on?

- There was an abuse of Spiritual gifts and jealousy among the believers as to the gifts given.
- The wealthy were not honoring the Lord's supper in an appropriate way and were marginalizing the poor.
- Some in the church were clinging to their liberties in a way that did not build up fellow believers.
- And as we've seen in the past few weeks, some were being sinfully divisive over church leaders – essentially adopting the Roman culture's values – a culture that was starkly divided over ethnicity and social rank. (Citizens vs. slaves; rich vs. poor, elite vs. commoner, Romans/Greeks vs. Barbarians)
- In short, the world was in the church, and they were not running the race well, which is why Paul sends them the corrective letter.

My sense is we are tempted to look down on the Corinthian church which had Christians who were no more than three years old when Paul wrote the letter. Now, we've all met Christians who have been following the Lord for three years who are overflowing with wisdom and Christlikeness, and we've met Christians of the same spiritual age who as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:11, are "Talking, thinking and reasoning like a child", rather than putting away childish things and acting like an adult in the Lord. One of the

causes of the disparity in spiritual maturity among Christians is what Paul addresses in the Philippian passage.

The problem with the church at Corinth, and the problem with the church today is that we are prone to take as Chuck Swindoll wrote many years ago, three steps forward and two steps back in our Christian walk – all because we give into the power of the flesh in our lives; fail to be obedient to the Word of God; fail to properly assess where we are in our Christian journey; and because we fail to press forward in a walk of humility to be holy as He is holy.

We are looking today at Philippians 3:12-16 because in the letter Paul writes to the church at Philippi to encourage them to find joy in every circumstance of life, Paul gives the prescription in a few short verses as to how we can stop going three steps forward and two steps back in our Christian journey to be more like Christ.

Let's read the passage one more time and then peel back the principles Paul gives us to help us in our journey of faith.

Philippians 3:12-16

“Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have obtained.”

The first principle that emerges from this passage is that Paul recognizes he has not arrived. He appropriately measures his spiritual progress, and this is something followers of Christ must do.

### **1) Measure Your Life Appropriately**

#### **Philippians 3:12-13**

Paul says, “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;”

To get some context, let’s look at the preceding verses. Paul says in Philippians 3:7-8, “But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ.” Paul uses three words in these two verses: count, gain and loss – that carry accounting connotations which reflect a deliberate decision on Paul’s part to reevaluate his previous prestigious works or achievements in the flesh (his pharisaic heritage). Paul says these things which were to my gain or personal advantage, I now keep on counting these things as loss, or damage. In order to follow Christ, Paul counts all things in his past as a disadvantage so he can run the race and know Christ more intimately.

What verse 8 is suggesting is that we have to get things out of the way (put them in the rubbish pile) in order to have intimacy with Jesus Christ. Paul is saying I know Christ but I want to continually know everything about the fullness of Jesus in each and every area and decision of my life.

Then Paul says in verses 9 – 11 “And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” These verses deserve a message on their own, but we don’t have time. In a nutshell what Paul is saying is that those who are pursuing intimacy with Christ are allowing the Holy Spirit to flow through their lives to such an extent that people see Jesus. They see His resurrection power at work because the flesh is hidden and they see a “person” – the Lord Jesus Christ. The verse that summarizes this truth more than any other is Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”

As we look at verse 12 Paul does not say he has arrived at anything he has just been talking about in verses 8 - 11. He wants to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death, but he knows he hasn’t arrived. He knows he is a sinner – that he hasn’t died enough to self and his own agenda so that the resurrection power of Jesus could be seen in all facets of his life. He says, “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” Said another way, Paul is saying I’m setting my sights on “it”; and the “it” is knowing the resurrection power of Christ fully and having Christ’s perfect maturity reflected in his life.

What Paul does in verse 12 is to appropriately measure his spiritual life and journey by admitting in humility that he hasn't arrived. The application point for us today is to understand the Christian life is not an arrival – but a journey – and we are all at different places in that journey. As John Newton, the author of the hymn we sing entitled *Amazing Grace*, said about himself:

I am not what I ought to be.

I am not what I want to be.

I am not what I hope to be in another world.

But I am not what I once used to be.

And by the grace of God, I am what I am.

The principle Paul is giving us is critical and it's a sign of maturity, and the principle is this, that in humility we need to acknowledge where we are in our Christian walk – why? -- so that we can grow.

What Paul says next in verse 12 is of vital importance. He says, "or have already become perfect." This phrase is in the passive voice, perfect tense and indicative mood in the Greek, which means if I'm going to grow in maturity, God is going to have to do this in me. Paul has already acknowledged this truth in Philippians 1:6, where he says, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it and until the day of Christ Jesus." God always finishes what He has started for those he has chosen for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

In verse 13 Paul says, "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead." Paul says he is pressing on – there is a purpose for which God has laid hold of

him, and it is for Paul to have complete conformity to Christ and to reflect Christ's perfect maturity. Paul knows he hasn't arrived. He knows he has to press on and not slip into passivity. The implication for us today is to not assess ourselves as though we have arrived. If you have reached a level of maturity in your Christian life in 2025 that you never thought possible, that's wonderful. But there is a deeper level still – so press on.

If you think you have arrived the potential result of that way of thinking is the development of a judgmental or superior spirit that looks down on other people. This is just what happened in the Corinthian church and caused sinful divisions over church leaders. So, in all humility assess where you are in your spiritual journey appropriately.

The second principle Paul teaches in this passage is

## **2) Make and Establish Appropriate Goals (13b – 14)**

As we've already noted, Paul says in verse 13, "But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead." This phrase has two focuses: 1) Paul is forgetting what lies behind. Paul knows very well that no runner looking backwards can run a race well. So, we have to ask the question what is Paul wanting to forget? In the context of the passage Paul is likely referencing past successes in his apostleship that could give rise to pride or complacency; and his past boasting in fleshly achievements in Judaism which should remain in the rubbish bin. It doesn't mean we set aside past blessings we have enjoyed with Christ. We can enjoy those memories, but we can't stay there and "settle in." Our pasts can paralyze us so don't get distracted by the past.

2) Paul is reaching forward to what lies ahead. There is no such thing as standing still in the Christian life. Which is what the second focus is all about. The Christian's life should be forward focused. Today, you need to take one more step of growth; and reach forward or strain forward continually to what lies ahead. Paul wants to ensure he is

concentrating all of his efforts on the ultimate goal – Christlikeness today however imperfect and ultimately perfect Christlikeness in heaven.

I have two questions for you to ponder. The first question is are you really reaching out to go deeper in your intimacy with Him, and secondly, if not, what is holding you back? What do you need to get out of the way in order to grow?

In verse 14 Paul says, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This word prize that Paul uses in Philippians 3:14 is used only one other time in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 9:24 Paul says, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.” As we think of the word prize from a worldly standpoint, we might have the tendency to think of this as a competition where there is only one prize. In the Corinthian passage, however, it’s clear there is a race and the prize is for everyone who runs the race. In the context in which Paul uses the word in Philippians 3:14, he says the prize is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:28-30 summarizes the race and upward call from a theological standpoint. Paul says, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” We run the race by faith dying to self so the resurrection power of Jesus can be seen in our lives, and one day we will be with Jesus in glory!



As we appropriately assess our spiritual lives, we need to be focused on our own growth toward glory and take our eyes off of others. One of the ways we have implemented this principle at Emet Ministries as we disciple young Christians toward the goal of becoming like Christ, is to establish annual goals so that we can measure our progress in the faith.

I've attached a copy of the Strategic Growth Plan to my message which you can download and use in your own life, but this slide demonstrates it in a nutshell. (Slide)

The final principle we can glean from the Philippian passage is:

### **3) Manifest a Mature and Appropriate Attitude (15 –16)**

In verses 15 and 16 Paul says, “Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; however, let us keep living by the same standard to which we have obtained.”

Paul says the mature is the one who says I have not arrived, and if anything is going to happen in my life to mature me so that I continuously seek first His righteousness, it has to be the Holy Spirit through a work of grace in my life. The Christian attitude is not “work, work, work” in the power of the flesh. The attitude of the mature Christian is to trust by faith in the continuous work that Jesus does in a life totally surrendered to Him.

In sum, the mature say:

I haven't arrived.

There is more to know about Jesus than I know today.

I have to die to my own efforts in the flesh.

God has to do it as a work of grace in my life.

When that happens, other people see Jesus' resurrection power and not me.

Paul says in verse 15, “And if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you.” The word for “reveal” means to bring out from hiding. In other words, don’t worry. If you are a child of God and you think you’ve arrived, God will reveal it to you -- through trials and through chastening. If you have become puffed up by pride in your Christian walk and think you have achieved spiritual success without the Holy Spirit’s work in your life, then you have lost sight of a humble truth Paul reveals to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:7 when he asks them: “What do you have that you did not receive?;”

If you think you’ve arrived and earned anything you have in the Christian life, God, in His mercy, will humble you and bring you back to a correct way of thinking.

In verse 16, Paul encourages the church to line up under the standards which they have attained. In other words, stay on track. Keep doing the things that have brought you to the level of maturity you have attained.

What disciplines can the Christian engage in to bring him or her to maturity? You could by faith, ask God to help you to execute four disciplines to reach forward, strain forward, and press on to become Christlike. They include:

Read the Word.

Memorize the Word.

Meditate on the Word.

Imitate the Word.

Our core values at Westwood can be summed up in this one statement: Christ and His Word in life and worship. Our elders believe by faith and through the power of the

Holy Spirit, God will use the Word of God to make the children of God look like the Son of God.

### **Conclusion**

We've looked at but one thing I must do this morning: forgetting what lies behind and pressing on to what lies ahead. We've seen the three principles that Paul sets forth in this passage which are

- 1) Measure your life appropriately;
- 2) Make and establish appropriate goals; and
- 3) Manifest a mature and appropriate attitude.

As we close this morning I want to ask you a question. What are the chances today that you are always looking back in your Christian walk and aiming for nothing? If you profess to be a follower of Christ and are making no spiritual progress, it's possible you could be like members of the Corinthian Church who were still "talking, thinking and reasoning like children", but it's also possible that you don't know Him and the power of His resurrection in your life and you need to surrender today and receive Christ as Savior.

You get one chance at this life. Today the Word of God and the Spirit of God would call you to die to anything in this life that you thought was gain and count it as loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ as your Lord. Maybe, just maybe, you need to die today to self, receive Christ as Savior so you can truly live a fruitful Christlike life on this earth and spend eternity living with Him in all the perfections that entails.

The call for the Christian this morning is for you to ponder. . . and properly measure where you are in knowing Christ so you can develop a plan of growth to move forward one day at a time to maturity and righteousness in 2026. Perhaps this next year will be

a new spiritual chapter in your life and it will be the beginning of a new spiritual growth trajectory that will cause you and your family to celebrate the goodness, graciousness, and faithfulness of God in ways you never dreamed imaginable because you said today: but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what is ahead!

Let's pray.

Strategic Growth Plan:  
Goals for 2026

By God's Grace, I will grow into a leader in the following four categories:

**1. Wisdom - Intellectual Formation**

Scripture: Proverbs 1 & 2, 9:10, James 3:13-17, Romans 12

What it is: Know who God is; what our relationship is with Him; why He has called us.

Why it is important: Growing in wisdom ultimately impacts how we live our lives.

How I will grow:

**2. Stature - Physical Formation**

Scripture: Exodus 20:9-10, Romans 12:1, Mark 2:27, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 9:27, 10:31, Galatians 5:22

What it is: Not neglecting rest; not making food an idol; taking care of the physical temple we have been given

Why it is important: Growth in physical formation leads to eating, drinking, and living fully to glory of Christ.

How I will grow:

**3. Favor with God - Spiritual Formation**

Scripture: Psalm 62:1, 119:11 Daniel 3:12, 6:10, 9:3-10, Matthew 6:1-18, 33, Mark 8:36, Luke 10:38-42, Romans 12:1-2, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 3:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 11, 1 Peter 1:13-15, 2:1-3, 9-12, 3:15, 1 John 1:7-9

What it is: Be faithful in the little things; don't be pressed into the World's mold; don't be barren spiritually and cover it up with busyness; walk low in humility; look high to Jesus; go deep into your study of the Word; pray "in the closet" and "as you are going"; give to the Lord's work financially; flee immorality; hide the Word in your heart

Why it is important: Growth in spiritual formation leads to a life fleeing from sin, pursuing holiness, and treasuring Christ above all things as the Word outpours from the heart.

How I will grow:

**4. Favor with Man - Relational Formation**

Scripture: Proverbs 31:23, Daniel 1:8, 9-21, 2:14, Romans 12:9-21, 1 Timothy 3:7, Titus 2

What it is: Learn to say no; be salt and light to the community; serve the Evansville community; grow in relationship with non-Christians; leverage relationships for the sake of gospel ministry; grow in friendship and love with your spouse

Why it is important: Growth in relational formation leads to relationship with others that allows the gospel to go forward, deepens friendships, and furthers the cause of the kingdom of heaven.

How I will grow: