

## Pressing On When the Pressure's On

Philippians 3:12-4:1

Rev. Brian Bill

March 15-16, 2025

A little over a year ago, I celebrated how God is using Pastor Ed Hedding from Pleasant View Baptist Church in Bettendorf. He's a man on mission with a genuine love for the lost in our community. One of the ways Ed builds gospel bridges is by teaching a World Religions class at Scott Community College. Since then, he has started teaching at North Scott as well.

One of the assignments he gives his students is for them to attend a worship service and write a report about it. This week, he forwarded one of those papers written by a student after he engaged via the Edgewood livestream two weeks ago. I was eager to read it because I'm always curious what people think after worshipping with us the first time.

*The church looked very welcoming and exceeded my expectations with how nice, clean, and modern it was...Edgewood does a lot for the community...the service was very enjoyable and informative...I have never been to a religious church service before or viewed an online service, so it was a new experience for me. The sense of community was immediately noticeable from the comfortable and happy setting. The music was moving...the sermon was passionate and thought-provoking as I had never heard these ideas before. It changed my point of view...the atmosphere seemed full of acceptance and kindness...I would be interested in watching or attending another service...especially since I am questionable about my beliefs...it was a refreshing way to view new ideas, and I look forward to experiencing it more.*

This report made me go back and read what another student wrote in her paper over a year ago:

*I miss attending church, and this seemed like such an upbeat and kind one. I feel this experience gave me a new perspective of what church can be like. After watching this, I wouldn't mind attending church again. It just gave me a taste of the comforting and happy atmosphere, and I truly miss it...**[It made you feel like Jesus still loves you even if you have messed up in the past.***

It makes me sad that so many young people have never been to a church service before. At the same time, I'm thrilled to see how many are finding forgiveness from their past and fulfillment in the present. If either of you are watching today, please know this: *Jesus still loves you, no matter what you have done in your past!*

Last weekend, we celebrated how God is using FCA on campuses in the Quad Cities area. We also support InterVarsity and their work at Augie and Blackhawk and love how Youth Hope is giving hope to youth. In addition, we see lots of life change happening in our children, youth, and young adult ministries here! It's such an honor to be part of a church filled with faithful Christ followers who exhibit joy by pressing on to know Christ and to make Him known. Our guests can see what you have and want it for themselves!

Last weekend, we learned how *a relationship with Christ, not a religious resume, is what makes us righteous*. Paul made it very clear that the seven accomplishments on his spiritual resume were smoldering rubbish compared with knowing Christ:

1. Ritual.
2. Relationship.
3. Respectability.
4. Race.
5. Religion.
6. Reputation.
7. Righteousness.

Paul used forceful words to warn the Philippians about false teachers who were tripping up new believers. Speaking of that, did you see the story about the Virginia high school track athlete who has been charged with assault and battery after she used her baton to clobber another runner in the head to knock her out of the race? In a similar way, the Judaizers were attempting to knock Christians out of the race by enforcing legalistic requirements.

As we look at the second half of Philippians 3, we'll see how Paul balances these seven accomplishments with seven essentials for running and winning the race of faith. Several times in Scripture the Christian life is referred to as a race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:7; Hebrews 12:1). These essentials will help us get into spiritual shape so we can run the race set before us.

Here's our main idea: *You will never coast into Christlikeness because spiritual growth is intentional, not automatic.*

I've used parts of Warren Wiersbe's outline for this passage and have added a few points to it.

**1. Dissatisfaction.** To run the race and keep moving forward, first we must be dissatisfied with where we are right now. Paul had some incredible faith experiences like meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was caught up into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:4), he wrote a number of letters, preached incredible sermons, and yet, after walking with Christ for about 25 years, he was not satisfied with the status of his spiritual life.

We see this in the first part of verse 12: ***“Not that I have already obtained this, or am already perfect...”*** Paul had just stated in verses 10-11 that he wanted to know Christ experientially, practice the power of His resurrection, share in His sufferings, and eventually be raised to new life after he dies. That's his resolve, because he knew he couldn't coast into Christlikeness. He had not yet ***“obtained”*** it, which means he had not fully grasped the godly life. He knew he was far from ***“perfect,”*** which refers to being made complete. Paul had no trouble admitting his transgressions according to 1 Timothy 1:15: ***“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”***

Friend, if you want to grow, the first step is to admit how far you still have to go. I've been a Christian for decades and I wish I was a lot further along than I am. We could say it this way: *If you think you've arrived, think again because the room for improvement is the largest room in the world.*

Will you admit what God and everyone around you already know? You're not perfect. Don't be self-satisfied like the believers in the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:17: ***“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”*** Some of us have stopped growing because frankly we think we've arrived, or at least that we're doing better than others.

**2. Devotion.** The tendency for some of us is to just give up when we realize how often we mess up. Or maybe we've just settled in spiritually by trying to coast in

our Christianity. Paul didn't do that. His dissatisfaction led him to become more devoted as we see in the second half of verse 12: ***“But I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”*** To ***“press on”*** means to ***“pursue as a hunter.”*** Also, used of a sprinter in the Greek games, it has the idea of moving rapidly and energetically toward an objective, straining every spiritual muscle to win the prize. This makes me think of how Asahel chased after Abner in 2 Samuel 2:19: ***“And Asahel pursued Abner, and as he went, he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner.”*** Hosea 6:3 captures this idea: ***“Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD.”***

Sanctification must be diligently and intentionally pursued. This year, we're focusing on revitalization and mobilization. We want every individual to be revitalized and mobilized and every ministry to be freshly energized and faithfully equipped. One example of this is what's happening on our Edge Missions team! Stay tuned for some exciting developments. As the Holy Spirit revitalizes us, we'll be mobilized to live on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations.

Paul not only chased after Christ; he also wanted to catch Him, if you will. He wanted to ***“make it my own,”*** which means to ***“take eagerly, to lay hold of.”*** Jesus had taken hold of him, slamming him to the ground in Acts 9, and now he wanted to make sure he was holding on to Christ.

One of Charles Spurgeon's mottos was this: ***“I hold and am held.”*** The Lord had seized Paul and now Paul was determined to serve his Savior for the rest of his life. Are you giving maximum effort in your spiritual life, or are you a Christian on cruise control? Turn your dissatisfaction into devotion and pursue Christ like never before.

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**3. Direction.** In the spiritual life, direction makes all the difference. In verse 13, Paul states again how he falls short: ***“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.”*** Paul had a single-minded focus like David who prayed in Psalms 86:11: ***“...unite my heart to fear your name.”***

Friend, what “one thing” do you do? Too many of us are too involved in too many things. This phrase, “*one thing*” is used several times in Scripture to help us see how our faith must be single-minded, and laser focused:

- Psalm 27:4 – “***One thing** have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.*”
- Mark 10:21 – “*And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack **one thing**: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’*”
- Luke 10:42 – “*But **one thing** is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.*”
- John 9:25 – “***One thing** I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.*”

One grandfather gave this advice to his grandson: “*Just do one thing right in your life and you’ll be way ahead of most people.*” Paul knew that if he was going to move forward, he had to be unleashed from his past. Runners in a race don’t look behind them, as it can disrupt their rhythm and cause them to trip and fall on their face.

Both Roger Bannister and John Landy had broken the four-minute mile. In 1954, they raced against each other. Landy led until the final curve, at which point he looked over his shoulder to gauge Bannister’s position, which allowed Bannister to overtake him on his blind side. If we keep looking back, you won’t win the race.

There are at least two areas I think Paul had in mind when it came to forgetting what is “*behind.*”

- **The garbage of good stuff.** Like we learned last weekend, Paul wanted to forget even the good things on his religious resume because none of them would get him any closer to God anyway.
- **The garbage of guilty stuff.** Paul had plenty of reasons to feel guilty and ashamed. After all, he had slaughtered saints and persecuted Christians. Let’s circle back to what the student wrote in her paper after watching our service: *Jesus still loves you even if you have messed up in the past.* You don’t have to be gutted by guilt or live in shame any longer!

Let me tell you about a man I knew from our previous community. I'm going to call him Tom, though that's not his real name. He never attended the church I pastored but that didn't stop me from reaching out to him. Tom was tormented. Whenever I saw him, his shoulders were drooped, his face was drawn, he talked slowly and quietly, and he shuffled as he walked. When I would ask him how he was doing, his response never changed: *"Not good. I'm very worried."* I'd ask him why he was worried and invariably he would answer, *"Pastor, I've committed the unforgivable sin and I'm going to Hell."* I spent hours with him over the course of many years, trying everything I could think of to help him find forgiveness for whatever was tormenting him. As far as I know, he has still not found freedom.

Paul knew he couldn't keep chastising himself for his past failings and he also knew he couldn't keep patting himself on the back for past successes. Focusing on our past sins can paralyze us and only remembering the good stuff can make us prideful, complacent, or apathetic. Some of you are so tied to the troubles of your past that you're not moving anywhere in the present. Don't lose your present to your past. In short, it's time to stop doing PENANCE. It's also time to get off the PERFORMANCE track. What you need is the PARDON that only Christ can give you.

To ***"forget"*** in the Bible means *"to no longer be influenced by or affected by."* While we can't wipe stuff out of our memory banks, we can break the power of our past by allowing the Lord to unleash us from its influence. We must choose to not remember by choosing instead to look forward. Incidentally, Paul does not say he forgot one time and now he's done. Rather he uses the word ***"forgetting,"*** which is in the present tense, meaning we must do it on a regular basis.

As a warning not to let your past paralyze you, remember what happened to Lot's wife in Genesis 19:26: ***"But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt."***

As a sprinter straining toward the finish line, don't look behind you. This word picture here is of an athlete stretching out her neck, mobilizing every muscle, giving everything to win the race. You can't run forward by looking backward. *If you want to grow, you must let some things go.*

While it's difficult to put the past behind us, it's even more challenging to be proactive in the present so we're transformed tomorrow.

- Are you stalled out spiritually?
- Is bitterness holding you back?
- Are past regrets keeping you from moving forward?
- What sins are strangling you?
- Has guilt knocked you out of the joy journey?
- Who do you need to forgive today?
- Who do you need to ask forgiveness from?
- Is there an unholy habit in your life which is making it hard for others to be around you?

Edgewood offers Celebrate Recovery every Friday night at 6:00 p.m. to help people find freedom and forgiveness so they can get back in the race.

I like the creative title one pastor used for his sermon on this passage: “*Yesterday Ended Last Night.*” If you want to move forward, you need to let go of what’s behind because your past can be a prison.

*Look not back on yesterday  
So full of failure and regret;  
Look ahead and seek God’s way –  
All sins confessed you must forget.*

The phrase “**straining forward**” refers to “*exerting oneself to the uttermost by stretching out and straining toward something,*” much like runners do at the finish line of races. As Paul neared his finish line, he didn’t look back, slow down, or slack off. Instead, he stretched out with great effort. 1 Corinthians 9:24 says, “***Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it.***”

When David Livingstone, a pioneer missionary to Africa, returned to Great Britain he was asked this question, “*What do you want to do now?*” I love his response: “*I am ready to go anywhere, provided it be forward.*” Listen. If you’re not moving forward, you’ll go backward. If you are not growing in sanctification, you’ll go south spiritually. If you hit the pause button, your faith will flounder.

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**4. Determination.** Paul not only turned his dissatisfaction into devotion and direction, but he also demonstrated determination in verse 14: ***“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*** To ***“press on”*** has the idea of *“intensely pursuing the prize, running flat out, bearing down in order to win.”* The ***“prize”*** refers to awards and rewards.

We must put the past out of our minds and focus on the future because we are called heavenward. Focusing on the future will have a purifying effect on the present as we see in 1 John 3:2-3: ***“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”*** As we look up and look ahead, we’ll be less prone to be paralyzed by our past. We’re to live for eternity, expecting either the Rapture or our departure at death to the shores of Heaven.

High in the Alps is a monument raised in honor of a faithful guide who died while ascending a peak to rescue a tourist. His epitaph is powerful: *“He died climbing.”* Will that be said of you? Will it be said of me? We’re to pursue the prize with dogged determination, so that when we die, we’re already on the way up.

**5. Discipline.** To keep moving forward, we must exhibit discipline. After all, the word discipline is part of the word discipleship. Look at verses 15-16: ***“Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”*** Some people act like they have arrived spiritually, thinking their sins smell better than other people’s sins as they look down on those who sin differently than they do. Paul is challenging all of us to continue our quest to knowing God more fully as we move forward. The phrase ***“hold true”*** means our walk must match our talk.

During Second Winders on Thursday, Sherm McIntyre shared a story with Jim Koehler: *“One day God looked down on the earth and saw all the bad behavior going on, so he sent a couple angels down to check things out. When they returned, they told God, ‘It’s a complete mess down there. Only 20% are living like Christians.’ God was saddened by this news, so He decided to send a letter to the 20% to encourage them and give them hope.”*

Sherm turned to Jim and asked, *“Do you know what was in the letter? I don’t know...I didn’t get one either.”* When Jim told me this joke, he added, *“Actually, I did get the letter. It’s in the Bible. I just need to read it.”*

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**6. Discipleship.** To stay in the race, we must deepen our discipleship. We do that in two ways. Verse 17 says we're to follow the good examples of others: ***“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.”*** In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul declares, ***“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”*** The word ***“example”*** refers to a mold into which clay or wax was pressed. It's healthy for us to have believers to look up to, people who can mentor us as they model Christ. To ***“keep your eyes on”*** means to ***“fix your gaze on, to observe, or pay attention to.”***

Ray Pritchard writes,

*“Think of the Christian life as a long parade from earth to heaven. At the head of the line is Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation. Step by step He is leading His followers to glory. It's a long road with many twists and turns but He is fully committed to seeing that we make it in the end. Since the parade is long and filled with millions of people, we need folks in front of us who can keep us on track. We need mentors, models, heroes if you will, people who are farther along in the spiritual journey who can keep us pointed toward the Lord. Without such input, we're likely to veer off the trail and end up in the wilderness.”*

Ponder these two questions:

- **Who are you following?**
- **Who is following you?**

That's at the core of our Intentional Discipleship ministry where we seek to match a more mature believer with someone who is just starting out. We define *a disciple as a believer who lovingly follows Jesus and intentionally helps others follow Him.*

Verses 18-19 challenge us not to follow bad examples because not every relationship is good for you: ***“For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is***

***destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*** Be careful about who you hang out with because you could eventually become like them. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, ***“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’”***

When Paul considered their destiny, which is destruction, he broke down and wept. The word ***“tears”*** refers *“to wailing aloud.”* In Romans 9:2, Paul wrote, ***“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart”*** about the lostness of Israel. In Acts 20:31, he warned the church and then he wept for the church. When Jesus looked out over the unbelief which had taken up residence in Jerusalem, Luke 19:41 says ***“He wept over it.”*** When’s the last time you cried over the condition of someone?

Notice how Paul says ***“many”*** live as enemies of the cross. True believers are always in the minority as Jesus stated in Matthew 7:13: ***“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.”*** We need discernment to grow in our discipleship.

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**7. Delight** (3:20-4:1). Paul doesn’t want to end on a down note, so he brings it all together by focusing on his delight in verses 20-21 and 4:1: ***“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”***

Our perspective will determine our priorities and our attitude will determine our altitude. As we live in the future tense, we will have freedom from the past and find delight in the present. These closing verses establish several truths to delight in which will change our perspective so we can ***“stand firm in the Lord.”***

Listen to the lyrics to the song, “This World is Not My Home.”

*This world is not my home;  
I’m just a-passing through.  
My treasures are laid up;  
Somewhere beyond the blue.*

- **Our home is in Heaven.** We are citizens of another place. This world is not our home because we are just passing through. Since Philippi was a Roman colony, its citizens had a lot of pride in their nationality and enjoyed privileges other communities did not have. As good as they had it, Paul redirected them to their true citizenship in Heaven. I like how C.S. Lewis put it, “*Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.*”
- **Jesus is coming again.** We need to eagerly wait for Jesus with the expectation He could return at any moment.
- **Everything will be made right.** All things will be brought under His order.
- **We will be transformed.** The best is yet to come.
- **Other believers should give us joy.** We need to love and long for others as we consider believers to be our joy and crown. Joy ultimately comes from Jesus and from being in relationship with others. Perhaps you’ll find this acrostic for JOY to be helpful.

Jesus.  
Others.  
You.

If we want to press on when the pressure’s on, we must put these truths into practice.

1. **Dissatisfaction.**
2. **Devotion.**
3. **Direction.**
4. **Determination.**
5. **Discipline.**
6. **Discipleship.**
7. **Delight.**

In 1904, which is the year before Edgewood started, Bill Borden graduated from high school. His parents were extremely wealthy and gave him a graduation gift of a trip around the world. As he traveled through Asia and the Middle East, he felt a growing burden for the world’s hurting people and wrote home about “*his desire to be a missionary.*”

Even though young Borden was wealthy, he arrived on the campus of Yale University in 1905, trying to look like just one more freshman. Very quickly, however, Borden's classmates noticed something unusual about him, and it wasn't his money. One of them wrote: *"He came to college far ahead, spiritually, of any of us. He had already given his heart in full surrender to Christ and had really done it."*

During his college years, Bill Borden made an entry in his journal which defined what his classmates were seeing in him: *"Say 'no' to self and 'yes' to Jesus every time."*

During his first semester, Borden started a prayer group that soon spread across the campus. By the end of his first year, 150 freshmen were meeting weekly for Bible study and prayer. By the time Bill Borden was a senior, 1,000 of Yale's 1,300 students met in such groups.

Fixing his eyes on reaching Muslims in China, Borden never wavered. After graduation, he went to Egypt to study Arabic. While there, he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead.

When the news of his death was cabled back to the U.S., the story was carried by nearly every newspaper. His biographer wrote, *"A wave of sorrow went round the world...Borden not only gave (away) his wealth but himself, in a way so joyous and natural that it (seemed) a privilege rather than a sacrifice...Bill's life could be summarized with three phrases: No reserves. No retreats. No regrets."*

Bill Borden knew this truth: *You will never coast into Christlikeness because spiritual growth is intentional, not automatic.*

### **Action Steps**

The vapid Christian cliché, "Let go and let God" is not all that helpful. A better phrase would be this, "Trust God and get going."

I like what Don Carson says, *"The dominant biblical pattern is neither 'let go and let God' nor 'God has done His bit, and now it's all up to you,' but rather, 'since God is powerfully at work in you, you yourself must make every effort.'"*

What is God calling you to do for His glory with the story of your life? Whether you're a high school senior or a senior citizen, wherever you are and whatever you're navigating, it's time to trust Him and get going.

- Gather with God's people every weekend.
- Grow in your devotion to God by practicing the spiritual disciplines.
- Give what God has given you.
- Go with the gospel to your neighbors and to the nations.

I close with something Pastor Chris has said that I think about often: "*I told God whatever He wanted, wherever he wanted me, the answer is already 'yes.'*" Is your answer the same?

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**Membership at 10:45** – Ashlee Blue (Pastor Daniel)