

Series: Side by Side
Message Title: **Striving Towards Maturity**
Date: Sunday, April 29, 2018
Scripture: Philippians 3:1, 12-16
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Location: Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, GA

Introduction

Let's be honest...The Christian life is a struggle. Though it is a life of wonder, delight and fullness of joy, it is a life that is marked and marred by conflict, struggle and pain.

We don't sell our faith based on ease. The idea of a "prosperity gospel" is both imaginary and empty, not to mention deceitful and unbiblical.

Everyone faces adversity and must find ways to persevere through the oppressing moments of life. Yet it is through our struggles and strife we grow in wisdom, maturity and faith.

One of the themes of Philippians is this: We are better together through struggles. We have already examined "worship" and "service," but something we cannot negate or separate is that Paul had much to say in

Philippians about the shared struggles and suffering of the Christian life.

“God develops maturity out of adversity.”

- Paul suffered at Philippi: Acts 16:22-24 and beyond; Philippians 1:12-14
- Philippian believers suffered: Phil. 1:29-30
- We suffer. Let’s just affirm this together today. How many of you had problems—painful problems—and hurts to bear since you called upon the name of the Lord to be saved?

It is not the presence or absence of pain and suffering that is impacted by our faith; it is what happens in and through us because of our faith. When we struggle, suffer and hurt as believers, we often (dare I say) always discover we are better together through struggles.

“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. 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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 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” (Philippians 3:12-16 ESV).

In Philippians 3:15, “think this way” means to have this disposition—don’t let complacency be your attitude, but commit to pursue maturity.

Paraphrased: *“I know what I am and I know what I am not, yet in all these things, I’m not what I was and I keep my eye on the prize!”*

It is this matter of mindset I want to address today. “Paul provides an inspiring and instructive path for growing in spiritual maturity.”

Paul describes here that the life of a Christian is a passion beyond the thresholds of pain that so often devastate us. Although we can struggle, strain and strive; those things are not without purpose or reason.

In the midst of the worst life can send our way, we see and seek the best God can do in our lives.

... “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death” (Philippians 3:10 ESV).

Paul talks about sharing in the sufferings of Christ and discovering resurrection power. When life brings its worst (death), God gives His best (life in Christ)!

This is important for us to know and remember because it provides perspective and hope when we hurt. This text is about the challenge and struggle to pursue maturity. In Philippians 3:12,15 the same word, *telios*, is used—to be complete, fully developed or mature.

Let’s examine the evidences of a maturing faith in Paul and in us.



Maturity is Ever a Process, Never a Possession (this side of Heaven)

Maturing is an ongoing process and no one has arrived—"not that" (Philippians 3:12). Christ has laid hold of me and I want to fully engage my life for this purpose. It's cooperation, not rebellion. Paul was dissatisfied and it was a clear reflection of his spiritual maturity.

"There's a difference between being dissatisfied and being disgruntled. Dissatisfaction is a recognition of the need to continue to pursue a higher standard; disgruntled is a need to vent my emotional frustration with life as it is."

I know plenty of disgruntled believers, but sadly, I'm not as familiar with dissatisfied believers. Paul refused to let life just arrive. He wanted to advance in faith and knowledge of Christ. This is very important because I believe this to be one of the most important signs of credible conversion.

It is apparent to me there is significant “arrested development” in the church. So many are comfortable and complacent with where they are and as they are in the faith. But Paul reflects a spiritual ambition that is not easily disabled.

“Self-dissatisfaction lies at the root of our noblest achievements.” —F.B. Meyer

When I meet people who seem to have little or no desire to grow in Christ or bear concern about how their life brings glory to God, I soon realize many do not have a motivation problem, but a conversion problem.

Paul made it crystal clear that conversion had changed the whole motivational drive of his life, and in all things he wanted to please Christ and bring glory to Christ.

“The issue for the Christian is not what is life doing to me, but what does God want to do in and through me? How can I give glory to God even in seasons of grief and pain?”

Note Paul’s testimony. He had been a performance perfectionist (Philippians 3:4-6),

but then He came to Christ and it changed everything. Paul wasn't about self-righteous satisfaction, but all about Christ—knowing Him, honoring Him, growing in Him, and living for Him.

One of the great struggles of the Christian life is to continue to cultivate a holy discontentment that we may continue toward advancement in growth and maturity in Christ.

“It may be true that wise young believers are very rare. But is no less true that zealous old believers are very rare also.” —Bishop J.C. Ryle

**Maturity is Not Determined by My Past;
It is Developed Through Daily Focus
on Spiritual Purpose**

“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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14 ESV).

Paul makes it clear his life is centered on a new spiritual purpose. He has something worth living for today and for eternity, and he is not going to let his past sins or successes distract his attention or absorb the energies needed to advance in his walk with Christ today.

In order to make the point, Paul points to the imagery of a runner and a race. He sees the Christian life as a race. He sees the believer as a runner who has to prepare and endure the challenges of the race. And he shares his own testimony of discipline and focused development—all the way to the end of the race—to encourage us as he encouraged the Philippians to pursue Christ. Running requires stripping down and letting go of things. You don't carry things when you run.

We love to hold on to things. Americans have become a nation of hoarders!

In Philippians 3:13, Paul says, "Forgetting what lies behind." I am not going to be tethered to or encumbered by my past. I can't advance looking down or looking backwards.

The clearest vision is given to the one who forgets the past. You hear people in the church say, "Well, it's just not like it used to be anymore. I remember the good old days. We were all involved doing this, and we were all involved doing that, and we were doing this, and it was like this, and this is how it was. And it was all so great."

The past means absolutely nothing to the moment except it will paralyze you. The runner doesn't go to the blocks in a sprint, sit there and get ready for the race by saying to the guys around him, "I just want you to know I've won a lot of races in the past. Boy, I've run fast in the past. I remember when I ran fast over here, and I remember when I ran..."

In response, the other runners will probably think, "Really? Who cares? Get in the blocks. This is another race. We're really not interested in what has been done in the past. If you don't look good today, you're not going to win. Forget talking about your life in the past."

The runners also don't want to hear some guy get in the blocks and say, "Oh, you know,

I have so many sins in my past. Last night I ate a hot fudge sundae; I know it will weigh me down. I'll never be able to run this race. I will never be able to succeed. I know I'm not going to win. In addition, I got the worst lane in the draw and this is not going to work out."

The other runners' response? "Just run the race! Nobody's interested in all of that stuff out of your past."

God is interested in what you are going to do now and where you are going in the future? Churches are full of people who are holding all kinds of grudges, bitternesses, perspectives and junk from the past, and they are paralyzed by it. The recollection of what you were in your former, unconverted state shouldn't paralyze you and shouldn't discourage you. Disappointments and temptations of the past must not depress you. Put your hand to the plow! Don't look back and move, pursue the prize!

I'm not saying nothing from the past matters; I am saying living in the past will keep us from doing what matters today! This includes both accomplishments and defeats.

We cannot and must not trip over our preferences and experiences so as to quit advancing today.

**Maturity is the Outcome of a
Primary Focus on the Person of Christ,
Not Religious Performance**

“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14 ESV).

Note this is personal (“I”) and it is practical (“one thing”—singleness of purpose). So many live with no clear sense of direction in life. Modern translation: “These 50 things I dabble in.”

What is God’s call for all of us? To know Him. How do we know Him? In Christ. Thus the Christian is one who seeks the knowledge of God and the exaltation of Christ in all things.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33 ESV).

Paul talks about focused-living for Christ—pursuing the person of Christ. Contrast this

with Paul's old life in Philippians 3:4-10. Paul says, "I press." This is the idea of reaching, straining and engaging at the highest level possible to get to win.

Many get tripped up by faulty concepts of maturity:

Knowledge. Just because you've done a Bible study on something doesn't mean you've apprehended or developed the truth, OR being exposed to sound biblical teaching automatically solves problems.

There is not a text and verse to answer every challenge you face.

Activity. Just because you are a busy Christian does not mean you are growing in authenticity and intimacy with Christ. Sometimes we are busy doing the wrong things.

Experience. If you are having a tough time, it doesn't mean you are nonspiritual or out of fellowship with God. People who know and love God hurt deeply.

Issues. There is much emphasis on where you are pressing the gospel on social issues in our day. There are many “wrongs” in our world and believers need to stand and act with courage, but in the end, you were not enlisted for a cause; you have been called to Christ!

Paul feared failed performance and disqualification if he failed to run toward the prize that lasts. What is this? Running after everything but Christ.

“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. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27 ESV).

Do you feel Paul’s struggle?

I’m not talking about human will-power, but rather submission to the will of God that the

power of God may be evident and expressed in and through your life.

Paul wanted to embrace the upward call and the prize.

What is the upward call? Arriving at the podium to receive the reward for winning the race. Paul wanted to be a spiritual winner. He had known the pitfalls of being a religious performer, but now he wanted to win—not for himself, but for Christ.

What is this prize? It is something yet to come and it is something of great value. It is the full and final knowledge of Christ and conformity to Him.

Maturity Does Not Happen Apart From Community

Let us think this way; let us hold true.

While the application was very personal in focus, the appeal was in association with others. We need each other and the support of our community of believers to challenge us and to sustain us in the struggles of maturity.

God has blessed us with babies, toddlers, children, students, college students, young professionals, singles, married people, young families, older families, people with grown children, grandchildren; people who have lost much, who have gained much, who suffer daily, who are in the midst of pain, and others in the midst of great joy. He has provided us with people from all kinds of backgrounds and present situations in order for us to be transformed into a God-honoring body that builds one another up towards the call to mature in Christ. And we must love each other towards that goal.

Just as members of a team call out, challenge to fight and demand performance, God gathers His church that we may share a mindset of perseverance toward maturity and keep reaching and pressing forward together.

We are better when we struggle and strive—
“hanging tough” toward maturity together.

It is reported that Benjamin Franklin said at the signing of the Declaration of Independence: “We must all hang together or we will all hang separately.”