

Rich Toward God: Laying Hold Of Christ – Philippians 3

Being rich toward God is not about burning yourself out trying to fit more good works, more religious activities, or more programs into an already busy life. Being rich toward God is about laying hold of Christ himself.

This is what the apostle Paul is talking about in Philippians 3. In these verses Paul is not rejecting the idea of making an effort to serve and obey Christ. But He is rejecting the idea that any amount of effort makes him right with God. The Christian faith is not about achieving righteousness through our efforts. It is about knowing Christ, who gives us his righteousness. Faith is not self-help fueled by religious productivity. Faith is confidence, trust, and allegiance to a living person. So, being rich toward God grows out of knowing Jesus - laying hold of Christ himself.

When Paul speaks of “knowing Christ,” he uses a word that describes intimate, lived relationship—the same word used to describe a husband knowing his wife. This knowing is not merely intellectual; it includes sharing in Christ’s sufferings and experiencing the power of his resurrection (v10). While Paul has not yet experienced resurrection in its fullness, he is already tasting its transforming power in the present. The proud, violent, hard-liner Pharisee is being reshaped into a humble servant who loves the very people he once despised (Gentiles). That change did not come from trying harder to reform himself, but from knowing Christ—his transforming power at work in Paul’s life, preparing him for resurrection day.

Paul has not yet obtained full transformation—he hasn’t arrived. The word *obtained* does not mean “achieved” or “earned.” It means to seize, to grasp, to lay hold of. Paul is not striving to earn more of Christ or his acceptance; he is striving because Christ has already made him his own—already embraced him and welcomed him (v12-14). Christ has given himself to Paul as a gift, and now Paul is ordering his life to fully receive that gift and all it entails. The effort Paul describes is not about paying for salvation or earning more of God’s affection or blessing. It is about aligning his life around knowing and being changed by Jesus himself. Paul is making an effort to lay hold of Christ.

But what does ‘laying hold of Christ’ really mean?

Today, “knowing Christ” is often thought of as a private, personal, or mystical experience. But in Philippians, Paul shows that knowing Christ happens as we live according to a shared pattern of life—the way he taught and modeled for living in community and participating in the progress of the gospel (v15-17). Pursuing this way of life is how we truly lay hold of Christ. As Christian author and evangelist David Watson explains,

“Although Jesus taught His disciples many truths concerning the kingdom of God, he wanted them most of all to know him. This is the meaning of eternal life. In their corporate life together they came to know him who is the life, and only with that background were they able to share that life—his life—with others. The word ‘know’ that is used for phrases like ‘knowing God’ or ‘knowing Jesus Christ’ is the same word that is used for a man knowing his wife. It speaks of the intimacy of a deep, personal union. For them to achieve such intimate knowledge, Jesus called his disciples into a living, loving community. He saw this as a top priority as he began building his church.”

Many believers find themselves stuck. They are doing many good things and are deeply dedicated, but they are tired, alone, and spiritually poor—the opposite of being rich toward God. In my experience, those who feel this way tend to share something in common: their lives are full of tasks—many of them good works—but there is little to no space for the basic practices that help them actually know Christ.

This is why the time-tested Christian practices matter. They are not random or additional spiritual activities; they are intentional and there is a progression to them.

Time-tested Christian practices that cultivate hearts and lives to be rich toward God:

Treasuring God

Practicing regular Sabbath rest

Daily contemplative prayer (acknowledging God's presence)

Unhurried meditation on Scripture (beholding Christ)

Loving His family

Regular table fellowship (shared meals)

Open sharing, conversation, and prayer around God's Word

Sharing our lives by practicing hospitality and generosity

Seeking His Kingdom

Regular intentional service especially toward the vulnerable (poor, widows, those in need)

Practicing diligence and simplicity using everyday work and resources to serve God's kingdom purposes

Grace-filled storytelling about Jesus in everyday life

The outward practices in the third column grow organically out of a life rooted in Christ and his people. Some of us are doing many good 'third column' things and are highly committed, but we are trying to meet every need, pursue every opportunity, and fix every problem that comes our way while living disconnected from intimacy with Christ and meaningful Christian community. Some need to hear this, "Stop trying to justify yourself. Stop trying to save others. And take hold of the one who saves."

Becoming rich toward God is not about adding more spiritual activity to an already crowded life. It is about reordering your life around knowing Christ together with other believers. This is where many of us need to slow down—not out of apathy or neglect, but out of wisdom. For some of us, the most faithful step right now may be doing fewer good works in certain areas of life, so that we can actually make space to know Christ with others.

To help our church grow richer toward God, we will be introducing a discipleship pathway over the coming year. This is not to add pressure. Not to increase busyness. Not to pile on more expectations. But rather, it is an invitation—gentle and intentional—to set aside some regular time to gather with a few other believers and to walk together through key Scriptures and shared practices - basic things passed down to us from Jesus and his apostles that are meant to shape our lives, our leadership, and our life together as a church.

As we begin to introduce this pathway, it is important to keep in mind that we aren't calling people to try harder and harder on some path to burnout. No this is about slowing down enough to establish new rhythms of life together so that we can truly lay hold of Christ. Because becoming rich toward God isn't about adding more and more to your life—it's about reordering what's already there, so that Christ—not performance, not pressure, not guilt—but Christ and his calling is at the center.

Some Questions to guide follow-up:

1. Where do you most feel the tension between striving to do good and resting in Christ in your own life?
2. Which of the practices feel most absent—or most needed—in your current rhythms?
3. What might it look like for you to "lay hold of Christ" together with a few others?