

Oct 12, 2025 Series “A New Path” -- Walking Forward Together
Philippians 3:12–16 (The Message)

Good morning, church! Today is the start of something new.

We’ve just finished an awesome series called *Created for Connection*,
where we remembered that God made us to belong—to our Lord,
to one another, and to the world God so loves.

But connection is not the end point. It’s the beginning.

Connection is the starting line of a journey.

& today we begin a 3 wk series, *A New Path*, because God is calling us
not just to stand still, not just to talk about faith, but to **live it**—
to walk forward together.

Paul’s words to the followers of Christ in Philippians 3:12–16
from *The Message* capture this forward energy.

Paul writes in this powerful short letter:

“I’m not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made.

But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ,
who has so wondrously reached out for me.

Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert
in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal,
where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus.

I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.

So let’s keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything
God has for us.

If any of you have something else in mind, something less than
total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you’ll see it yet!
Now that we’re on the right track, let’s stay on it.”

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

I love Paul's imagery here—

“I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.”

That’s the tone I want us to carry into this new season together.

October is here and we’re off and running...

And we’re not turning back!

Forward energy...**moving** on the new path that lies before us.

You know, it's easy to get swept up in that kind of momentum—

but before **we** run too far ahead,

let's take a moment to see where Paul was running from—
and who he was running toward.

When we understand what was happening in his world,
his words speak even more powerfully into ours.

Paul isn't writing this letter from comfort or success;
He's writing from prison (again),
To yet another young church still finding its way.

Most scholars believe Paul wrote this from his cell around the year 60—
waiting to find out if he would live or die from his preaching the gospel.
And yet this is one of the most joyful, hope-filled letters
in the New Testament!

He thanks the Philippians for their friendship and faith,
reminding them that God's work in them isn't finished,
and urging them to keep moving forward in unity and courage.

So when Paul says, “I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back,”
that's not coming from comfort... it's coming from conviction.
His body may be chained, but his faith is free, and its pressing on.

So when we understand that,
his words about pressing on & staying focused
take on a whole new power.
Because understanding his situation helps us hear God's invitation
to OUR church even more.

The Philippian church was in a Roman colony known for status, competition, and pride.

Earlier in chapter 3, Paul lists all his accomplishments:
born into the right family, educated in the right schools, zealous in religion.

And then in vs 8 he says, “I consider it all garbage
compared to knowing Christ”. His point?
The past may have shaped him, but it does not define him.
What defines him is Christ—and Christ’s call forward.

Now in vv. 12–16 I shared earlier, Paul admits something astonishing.
He said, “*I haven’t arrived. I don’t have it all together.*
But I’m pressing on.” Even the great apostle Paul says, “I’m still on the journey.”

And I find this so freeing! Because it reminds me...it reminds us—
that we don’t need to be perfect. We just need to keep moving.
The Christian life is not about arrival; it’s about pursuit.
It’s about persistence.

Other translations share Paul's words saying:

"I press on... I strain forward... I run toward the goal."

This is not passive faith. It's dynamic, active, sweaty faith.

Faith with motion...with Spirit-breathed forward momentum.

So I think Paul is sharing 3 key points we need to hear and take to heart.

First as we journey on God's path we must know that:

We Don't Walk Alone — Faith Is a Shared Race

Paul says, "*Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course.*" He pictures faith as a race we run together.

Last summer, I experienced this in the Swiss Alps. I shared in July a little of that adventure, but felt it was a perfect illustration for today.

Four of us hiked together for two weeks.

Some days the climbs were steep, the air thin,
the path rocky, and yeah icy still in July!

I was exhausted and thought, 'Why did I agree to this?'

But I wasn't alone. My husband and our friends walked with me.

When I slowed down, they encouraged me; when I hesitated, they said,
'We're in this together—you've got this!'

And because of that, I kept moving forward, step by step."

Well...that's church. That's FMC. We don't walk the path of faith alone.

We walk it side by side, shoulder to shoulder.

Galatians 6:2 says, "*Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*" Faith is a team sport.

This is why small groups, Sunday School, serving together,
worshiping together—matter so much.

Because when you get tired, someone else walks with you.

When you lose sight of the goal, someone else helps you look up again.

Friends, this is why we offer confirmation every two years.

We just began a class of 8 students from 8th-11th grade, who along with
their mentors, have begun a journey together—side by side—

~Discerning who Jesus is in their lives,

~What it means to be United Methodist,

~And how to live out their faith in a complicated, sometimes crazy world.

Talk about exciting forward momentum!

A new path in Christ...toward Christ...
is always before ALL of us in our faith journey...
is not “me and Jesus alone.” It’s “us and Jesus together.”
*We don’t walk alone...Faith is a shared race and adventure!

Paul’s 2nd point: Friends, Don’t Get Stuck in the Past — Focus Forward

Paul says, “*Forgetting what is behind, I strain toward what lies ahead.*”
He doesn’t mean wiping away memory.
He means not letting the past control the present.
And here’s the truth: churches far too often get stuck in the past.

At FMC, we sometimes say things like,
~ Remember when the church was full every Sunday?
or When Sunday School classrooms overflowed with kids?
or ‘When everyone knew everyone by name?’

Those memories are precious—but if we live only in nostalgia,
we’ll miss what God is doing right now.

Paul says: you can’t run a race while looking over your shoulder.
You’ll stumble. You’ll stall out.
You may even get off track & find yourself lost.
The new path...God’s path...requires us to face forward.

The prophet Isaiah echoes this: “*Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*” Is 43:18–19

God is always calling us into newness.
The past is not our prison. It’s our foundation.
But the future is God’s invitation.

*Don’t get stuck in the past...focus forward!

Today’s final Point: The Next Right Step Requires Purpose, Grace, and Courage

Paul says, “*I’ve got my eye on the goal,
where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus.
I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.*”

There’s **purpose**. Paul knows where he’s headed.
He has clarity of goal: its Christ.
There’s **grace**. Paul admits he hasn’t “arrived.”

He's still a work in progress.

He's saying, "Don't expect perfection of me—or of yourself.

Just keep moving onward...your eye on the goal-Jesus Christ."

And there's **courage**. Paul steps forward even though he doesn't know what every mile of the path will bring.

He doesn't know every twist & turn of his faith adventure...

But he presses on.

Now we've seen this at FMC, even in just the last few weeks.

In early October, the SPRC and Church Council approved the hiring of a new part-time Youth Director.

Why? Because God continues to stir new life among our kids & youth, and we believe THIS IS our next faithful step.

Our Program Ministry Director, Jeremiah, needs staff support in this exciting season of possibility and forward momentum.

We don't have every detail figured out yet,

BUT we know God is calling us to invest in the next generation.

That's purpose. That's grace. That's courage.

Friends, the future of this Spirit-filled church will not come all at once.

It will come one step at a time.

The important thing is not to know the whole map—

it's to take the faithful next step together...and the next, & the next.

*The Next Right Step Requires Purpose, Grace, and Courage

So here's the question for each of us: what is your next step?

Can you and I, can we as a church...commit to one next faithful step?

~Maybe it's **spiritual growth**: starting a daily prayer rhythm, joining 1 of our Bible studies or carving out space to listen for God.

~Maybe it's **service**: stepping into a ministry, helping with the nursery, Young Followers or Youth Group, or reaching out to a neighbor.

~Maybe it's **leadership**: saying yes to being a small group leader, or a committee member, or simply someone others can lean on.

~Maybe it's **generosity**: trusting God with your giving, taking a step of faith with your resources of time, talent & treasure.

The Christian life isn't about taking every step today. It's about taking the *next* step.

And here's the good news: you don't walk it alone. You walk it with Christ. You walk it with us.

Friends, this is what the journey of faith looks like—
not a sprint toward perfection, but a steady walk of trust and courage.
Each step we take together...
opens the way for God to do something new among us.

Paul says: *“I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back.”*

That’s the invitation of this series. Not perfection. Not arrival.
But persistence. Forward energy.
A willingness to take the next faithful step together.

So let’s walk this new path—not by ourselves, not stuck in the past,
not frozen in fear—but together, with Christ leading us forward.
May it be so. Amen and amen.