

Pressing On – 01/01/2012

Greg Boyd

Happy New Year, Everybody! Happy New Year! Minnesota has ushered in the New Year by finally acting like Minnesota. We knew that good run, that Kentucky winter we were having couldn't last forever, so it has arrived finally! We, typically, give out righteousness points based on how bad the weather is; and so, given today, I'd say we are about at a seven; seven righteousness points. So, the righteous are here. Way to go! Glad to have you here. Yeah! If you are visiting for the first time, I'm just kidding, we don't really mean anything by that, but we might have some sort of kudos to give folks who show up in bad weather. Anyway, my name is Greg Boyd. I'm one of the teachers here at Woodland Hills Church. It's good to see all of you. If you are visiting for the first time, we are really glad you are here. If you want to find out more about the church, what we believe, what we stand for, and how we are called to work with the King to change the world, stop by at the hub out in the gathering area, tell them you are visiting. We've got a package of information and CDs that we would love to share with you. One other announcement I want to make, and that is we've been doing this Making Space Campaign to raise \$26,000.00 to make our building a place where homeless folks can stay in the evenings and to replenish our food shelf. I mentioned, after 2 weeks, we had already raised \$32,000.00. After 3 weeks, we had raised \$64,000.00; and, as of now, we have raised \$96,000.00! Yes, praise God! That's fantastic! So, hats off! I just love the way the community here responds to the needs of the poor, and I'm expecting great things in that area in the future. All that money will be used to minister to folks in that area. In terms of the general offering, we are still in the tank, so just keep that in your prayer. Praise God for that!

The team that I speak with and talk with about putting messages together, the sermon team, felt that before we go back to the book of Colossians, and we will be getting back to the book of Colossians, we thought it would be good, this being the beginning of a new year, to talk about new beginnings. A lot of people are making New Year's resolutions, and so we thought it might be good to have a little Bible teaching around that. I myself am not a fan of New Year's resolutions because, usually, they are made sort of willy-nilly, haphazardly. Studies show that over half of them are broken by the end of January and over 90% are done by the end of the year. When we make commitments and resolutions but our hearts are not fully in it, what happens is they are, most likely, not going to succeed, and that kind of trains us for failure. So I think there should be much more intentionality and prayer that goes into resolutions that we make. Having said that, this being the beginning of a new year, it is a good time for us to reflect on our lives and what are the areas that we want to change; because, as we are going to see

here in a minute, the norm for the New Testament is that we are always supposed to be changing, always supposed to be growing, always supposed to be pressing on, never to be complacent, never to be coasting. So, I want us to be asking this question as we do this reflection on this passage of Scripture this morning and prepare our hearts to take communion, ask this question: As you are going to put yourself in that seat where you are right now or if you are listening through podcast wherever you are right now, fast forward one year from now, and on the first Sunday of next year, as you are listening to a message, what area do you want to have to be different? How will you be different one year from now than you are right now? You might ask the question, without falling into condemnation now, but just to learn, how are you different now than you were one year ago? See, in the kingdom, we are always supposed to be growing. There is always progress to be made. So, let's ask that question as we turn to this passage of Scripture. I'm entitling this message "Press On;" because, as we will see here, we are supposed to be always pressing on. God calls us to be pressing on for more change and more growth. Before I read this passage, I want to pray. Will you pray with me?

Father, we thank you for seeing us through another year. We thank you for this last year; your grace has sustained us. God, we commit this next year to you, and we are going to trust that your grace will sustain us throughout this next year. We pray, Lord God, that we would be a people, God, who have a fire for you. God, will you use this message as we sit here in your presence here this morning. Use this message to fan the flames of a fire, to create a passion in our hearts to pursue you and to grow and to change. God, bring a conviction that keeps us from ever being complacent or ever trying to coast. Be present here. Infuse this word with your power for all in the auditorium or listening through podcast, wherever they are, whatever they are doing, use this message. Make it a game changer, Lord, a game changer. Wake us out of our complacency. In Jesus' name we pray, and all of God's people said, Amen.

Philippians, Chapter 3. I love this passage, just love this passage. I will be reading five verses, and I'm going to break it down into several sections, and I'll make some comments after each section. It's a little Bible study here. Paul says, to begin:

Philippians 3:7

"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things."

Pause here for a moment. Paul is speaking about gains, all the gains he now considers loss. The gains are the things that he had just mentioned a few verses before this one. He talked about how he was with the tribe of Benjamin, and he was a Pharisee and was zealous for the law above his peers, and he was well educated. He had a lot going for him. He said that he could boast about a lot of things if that was what he was into. Those are all the gains. The gains are anything that the culture would give you kudos for having. In first century culture, you got kudos if you had the stuff that Paul had; a Pharisee got way up there. In our culture, it certainly would be different things, for sure. You know, generally, in our culture, folks consider it's a gain if you have got a lot of money or it's a gain if you have got a real good reputation and a lot of people know you, you're famous. It's a gain if you are pretty or sexy or it's a gain if you are smart or a gain if you are driving that car and wearing nice clothes or you are a celebrity, blah-blah-blah. You know what the gains are. All of that would go into this category. For Paul, it's this righteousness in the law and being a Pharisee and all that. For us, it's different things. But Paul says he considers all of those gains; everything that the world considers a positive, he considers a negative. He uses this word, "zēmia" (loss), and it means less than having no value, less than no value, less than worthless. It's a loss. It's a negative. It's a deficit. All the things that the world thinks is a positive, he sees as a deficit. The reason he sees it that way is because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ; the surpassing worth. The concept is of a worth that surpasses other things. So, Christ, he says, knowing Christ has a worth that so surpasses the worth of all other things that, by comparison, all these other things are a negative. They just mean nothing, less than nothing because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus.

The picture I get in my mind is something like this. If you are in a completely dark room without any light, if you got a little flashlight, it looks pretty bright. Oh, what a bright light! But it is only because there is no other light around. In a room of total darkness, a flashlight looks very bright. But you step into the sun, and you can't tell if the light is even on or not. It loses all of its shininess. Why? Because of the surpassing brightness of the sun. See how this works? So, also, if a mind does not have the light of Christ, a lot of things look bright, shiny, attractive. So, a mind that is devoid of the light of Christ is impressed by the light of doing the law in the first century; a Pharisee, oh! The tribe of Benjamin, oh! Doing a lot of works, oh! All of that appears, oh, wow, that's bright! In our culture, we look at the riches that someone has, "Oh, look how bright that is!" And the shininess of their car and the shininess of their sexiness and the shininess of their sports ability, and the shininess of their fame and "Oh, look at how bright that is!" But it's only bright because the world is so dark. You just step into the sun, and those lights are completely turned off. You don't even notice them anymore. When you step into the light of Jesus Christ, all that stuff just loses its impressiveness. When you step into the light of Jesus Christ, you are stepping into the daylight, in fact, you are stepping into the Son, S-O-N, and also S-U-N. And, if you are standing next to the sun, S-U-N, the source of all light, well,

you know what? Your flashlight just isn't going to cut it. No one is going to notice your flashlight. It's worthless. It's "zēmia." It's less than nothing. So, also, when you have the light of Christ, all the glitter and all the pomp and circumstance and all the gains of this world begin to look rather silly. They just lose their attractiveness, their value, they're blah, there's nothing. It's emptiness. And, if you find that, in fact, you are still pulled by some of that stuff, you still want the flashlight, part of you wishes you could get your hands on some of that, "I wish I could be famous and get my face on *Vanity Fair* or *US* magazine or *People* magazine," or whatever magazines are out there, that is just a sign that, to that degree, you are not full of the light yet. I would just encourage you to step more into the light. The more you are filled with the light of Jesus Christ, the less that glitter stuff is impressive. It just loses its appeal. It has got nothing going for it – blah-blah-blah. All right.

Because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus, all that he used to think was gain is now considered loss. And then he goes on:

Philippians 3:8, 9

"I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith."

Now, Paul, remember, his gains were the law and obedience and how well he kept it. So he gets rid of that, and the reason he gets rid of it is so that he will have the righteousness that comes by faith in Christ. He was getting his gain from doing the law. Now he says, not just that it's a negative, he ups the ante. He says it's garbage! Garbage is the most polite translation you can have of the Greek word "skybalon." It literally means "excrement," something you expel, and it could be applied to garbage because you expel it from your house, But its primary meaning is expelling something else. As garbage, as excrement! He says rubbish! Not only is he not impressed by that stuff anymore, but because his particular gain was the law, he is now revolted by it. It's disgusting! The idea that you can get right with God, that you can be righteous before God on the basis of your behaviors and obedience to the law, well, that is not only worthless, it stinks! It's revolting! It's disgusting! I want to throw it out! I want to run away from it! The idea of righteousness here, because he wants the righteousness that comes by faith and trusting in Christ, the word there means "right relatedness." We sometimes get an idea of righteousness as being prissy holiness. I'm holy. I don't smoke or I don't do this, whatever. But the concept is much more holistic. It means "right relatedness." To be righteous means that you are rightly related to God and rightly related to others. What Paul is saying here is that you can't get rightly related with God by doing the do's and avoiding the don'ts. That can't make you rightly related to God. Because, what sets us apart from God is way more

fundamental than our behavior. It goes way deeper than that. So, you can't on the basis of performing the law, even if you do it as good as Paul did, your righteousness is as we read in Ezekiel, it's as filthy rags! It amounts to nothing. On the basis of your do's and avoiding the don'ts, and your nice behavior, don't ever think you can impress God, don't ever think you can get God to like you more because of this, that or the other thing that you are doing or not doing. It's all excrement! Paul is saying here that when you come into the light of Jesus Christ and you begin to know God's grace and begin to see that God's love is for free, then you begin to see that legalism is a load of crap. That's, literally, what he is saying. Legalism is a load of crap! Be done with it! It stinks! The idea that you are going to impress God with your little behavior, no-no-no; the only kind of right relatedness that we could ever have is given to us by grace. It was given to us when we put our trust in Jesus Christ. When you come to the point, seeing this as part of the life of Jesus Christ, when you see the light, you begin to understand that what set you apart from God was way more fundamental than your little behavior. You were way worse off than that! As your mind gets enlightened, you begin to see that if God is not a God of mercy and a God of love and a God of grace, you haven't got a prayer! You haven't got a hope! All your right relatedness comes because of what Jesus Christ did for you on Calvary, and you put your trust in him. You place your confidence in him. Now you have that right relatedness that comes from God. It comes as a gift. It comes for free. If you are going to get it for free, then you have to quit that legalism game. He says, "I gave up on that in order that I could gain the right relatedness." Either you get it as a gift or you are trying to earn it; and, if you are trying to earn it, it's a load of crap. So get rid of it and receive it as a gift. Amen? Amen!

Moving on. He says this:

Philippians 3: 10

"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."

Okay. He says, "I want to know Christ." The concept of knowledge here isn't an intellectual knowledge because Paul already knew Christ intellectually. In fact, he had already put his faith in Christ, his trust in Christ, so he had all of that down. But, when Paul says, "I want to know Christ," he is using a biblical concept of "know," which means to know something intimately or to know it experientially or to know it from the inside, to know somebody in a biblical sense. People often think that this refers to sexual intercourse, but it has a broader application, and the Bible says that "the husband knew his wife." Well, it applies to that, as well, but aside of that, to know someone is to get on the inside of their life, to know someone intimately. So, Paul says, "I want to know Christ." Not just intellectually, but I want to know him from the inside. I

want to experience intimately Jesus Christ. I want to experience intimately. I want to get him inside as the power of the resurrection. I want to know from the inside that resurrected life. I want to know from the inside God's life coming into ours; that eternal life that we can now have and the source of all joy and the source of all peace and the source of all power, I want to know it. Yes! I want to know it intimately, experientially from the inside. At this point, we are probably all thinking, "Yes! We want to know that too, yes!" But then Paul says:

"And, I want to know intimately, I want to participate in his sufferings and become like him in his death."

At that point, we are probably thinking "Not so much." Ha-ha. We're not so excited about that one! When Paul talks about the sufferings of Christ, what he is getting at there, he's not saying, "Oh, I wish I had more aches and pains. I wish I had a broken back, or I couldn't walk." The sufferings of Christ are not the aches and the pains and even the tragedies that we sometimes experience in this fallen world, everybody has that. In a fallen world warzone, we suffer in different ways, but that's the suffering of the fallen human race. The sufferings of Christ are the sufferings that are unique to a kingdom person. They are the sufferings that we enter into because we are walking down a kingdom path. We are following in the ways of Jesus. There are sufferings that we could avoid if we were not kingdom people, sufferings that we could opt out of. There are the sufferings that just come as a part of humanity and part of life; you don't choose those, they happen to you or maybe you make choices that lead to them, but you can't just opt out of them. Whereas, these sufferings and sufferings of Christ, participating in his death, this is the kind of suffering that we go through because we are following in his way, we are followers of Jesus. Paul is saying here:

"I want to know them, I want to experience them." He says it, "so that I may attain to the resurrection."

Now, we might hear that as sort of teaching works. You want to suffer so that you can attain the resurrection. It sounds like you are saying, as some might think, that if I go through the suffering, well, this is sort of the prerequisite to getting the resurrection. Like, I've got to earn the resurrection by suffering. I am paying for the resurrection by suffering. I am going to merit the resurrection by suffering. But, he can't possibly mean that, can he? Because he just said that legalism is a load of crap; you can't work your way into the kingdom. What's he getting at here?

We, I think, might hear this teaching as teaching sort of works or suggesting works because we are messed up with our idea of grace. We might think this teaching goes against the concept of grace, but that's only because we in western culture, western Christianity, tend to have a rather screwed-up idea of grace. I say this quite a bit because I think it is so fundamental, but we in

western culture have a long tradition, in western Protestantism, anyways, where we frame everything theologically in a court-of-law context in terms of legal rules. So, the main paradigm we work with as we are thinking things through theologically is: We see God as the judge, and we are the defendants on trial, and Jesus is our lawyer and salvation is acquittal, grace is the attitude of the judge that gets us acquitted. That's how we tend to view things. We see the atonement that way, you know, Jesus cuts a deal with the judge and everything gets construed that way. Now, if that is our paradigm, then we instinctively hear a teaching like this as sort of violating grace or, at least, compromising grace. The way we might hear that is this: The judge says, "Okay, you're acquitted," because that's what salvation is, right? "But, if you want to be acquitted, you have to suffer." Or, it might be like a judge saying, "Okay, defendant, I will waive your prison sentence, but you have to do 40 hours of community service." We still might call it grace, but it seems like it would be more graceful if he didn't give us the community service. You see, by hearing a teaching like this, we compromise in grace, but that's only because we frame things in a court-of-law context.

We will do much better in thinking through things theologically in a New Testament perspective if we, instead of framing things in a legal context, frame everything in a marriage context. Frame everything in a covenantal context because everything in the New Testament, in fact, the entire Bible, is written with that kind of frame of mind. It's a covenantal kind of book. It's all about covenant. So, if you frame salvation and a relationship with God in a marriage context, well, then God isn't our judge, he's our spouse. What salvation is, it's not just an invitation, it's not just forgiveness and an invitation to be married, though it is that; but, beyond that, what salvation is is participating in the marriage. What salvation is is learning how to be a fit spouse to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. What salvation is is learning how to enter into the joy of being married to Jesus Christ and the power of being married to Jesus Christ and the peace that comes from being married to Jesus Christ. What it means to be saved is that you're in this marriage and, therefore, we are, as it says in I Peter, we are participating in the love that is God. We are participating in the divine nature. We are, as I like to say, and a lot of church fathers spoke this way: God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is this beautiful, loving dance that goes on throughout eternity, and we are invited to join in that dance. So, being married to Jesus Christ makes us one of the dance partners. So salvation is about learning how to dance with God, learning how to live with God, learning how to enter into the joy and the peace and the power of God, and we do that as his bride who is becoming increasingly radiant; a fit bride for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. That's what salvation is. So, when Paul is saying here about the suffering that we go through, it's not about earning anything or about meriting anything. It's about going in a direction that makes us that fit spouse for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

We have a role to play in this. It's all by God's grace. I said several weeks ago that we couldn't say yes to this marriage invitation if it wasn't for God's grace. We wouldn't say yes to God's invitation to be saved if it wasn't for God's grace. It's God's grace that empowers us to say yes to the invitation. It's God's grace that empowers us to begin to learn how to be the spouse that's a fit spouse for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. It's God's grace that empowers us to learn how to enter into the life of God and the joy of God, and the peace of God. It's all by God's grace; 100% by God's grace. Left to ourselves, we wouldn't even be interested in this. It's all by God's grace. There is a role that we play. The role we play, because God's not a coercive God, he's not a puppeteer God, the role we play is this: God's grace transforms us and enables us to be able to say yes, but God doesn't make us say yes. He won't coerce us to say yes. He empowers us to have that choice. There is still a choice we make. It's a choice we make when we enter into salvation, and it's a choice we make as we are in the process of salvation, because it is a process. The choices we make are very important because they set us down a road, a trajectory, which either leads to increasing transformation or not. Our job, then, is to yield to the power of the Spirit working in our life, the grace of God working in our life to yield, to go down the road that leads to the culminating point where we become the dance partners of God, the bride that's radiant and fit to be married to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Paul says here that he wants to suffer with Christ, get on the inside of Christ's suffering so that he could attain the resurrection. The word there in Greek is "katantaō," and it doesn't mean merit or achieve or earn. He's not saying, "I'm going to suffer so that I can earn the resurrection." He's saying, "I'm going to suffer so I may attain it." That word, attain, simply means to arrive at, to arrive at a destination point. So, he's saying that by the choices that we make, yes or no to God, and we do this every day of our lives, the choices we make set us down a course, a road, that leads in one direction or the other. If you want to enter into the power of the resurrection, learn how to become a person who knows on the inside that powerful resurrection that transforms us to be this radiant bride; the road there is a road that involves self denial and, therefore, it involves suffering. It involves going the way of Jesus. To say yes to God, then, is to say yes to that road. To say yes to the power of the resurrection is to say yes to the road that leads to the power of the resurrection. To say yes to God means that you are saying yes to the Jesus way of living. You are saying that I'm going to go down the road where I learn how to deny myself. I learn how to die that I might live. I learn how to put my own self interest aside. I learn how not to use my own advantages just for myself but to use them for the advantages of others. I learn how to love like Jesus and serve like Jesus and forgive like Jesus. We're going down that road. To say yes to God is to say yes to that. That's what it means; you're heading down that trajectory. The culminating point of this whole thing, what Paul wants to attain, he says, is the resurrection. He is referring there to the end of world history, the end of this probationary epic that we are in right now. It will come to an end. Maybe it will be this year, who knows? Hallelujah. But it will come to an end and then our bodies will be raised from the

dead and the kingdom is going to come in fullness and God's going to correct everything that's wrong in creation and then his kingdom will reign forever and ever, and we shall reign with him. When that time comes, when this culminating point comes, when we attain, when we arrive at that spot, well, then, everything about us that is inconsistent with the character of God is going to be burned away. All of our sin will be burned away. All of our pride will be burned away. All of our hatred and strife is going to be burned away. Our bondage to lust, praise God, is going to be burned away. All the addictions and oppressions are going to be burned away. Our self centeredness is going to be burned away. Our flesh life is going to be burned away. Our carnal mind is going to be burned away. Our racism is going to be burned away. All of our power struggles are going to be burned away. And then, what will be left is just what reflects the character of God, what puts God's love unambiguously on display. Then, we will be the radiant bride that is fit to be the King of Kings' and the Lord of Lords'. Then we will be perfected. All the dross will be burned up and what's left will be the radiant bride of Christ. Okay. That's the culminating point that the road takes us to, but Paul says he's not there yet. He's not there yet. This brings us to the main message I want us to be thinking about here.

The last passage that we are going to read this morning says this:

Philippians 3:12

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

I love that. I press on to make it my own, all the resurrection power of Christ my own because he has made me his own. This term "to be made perfect," the word is "teleioō," and it means to be complete. The root of the word is "teleios," and it has the connotation of a direction or a goal or an aim. "Teleios." So, "teleioō" means to have completed that process, to have arrived. So Paul is saying that to be made perfect is to have gone down this road all the way, to finally have arrived at the place that he was always aiming at, which is the kingdom, the resurrection, the radiant bride of Christ, the marriage supper of the Lamb. "I'm not there yet," Paul says, "and, therefore, I press on." The word here is "diōkō" in Greek. It means to run after, to pursue, to press in on something. It has the connotation of earnestness and urgency, to press on. He's saying, "I press on." Paul earnestly wants to make the resurrection power of Christ his own. He earnestly wants to make the undying life of God, the eternal life of God his own. He wants the righteousness of Christ to characterize his life now. He wants to make that his own. He's not trying to earn it; he's not trying to merit it; he's not trying to achieve it. In fact, he says that the reason he's trying to make the righteousness of Christ his own, to characterize his own life, and he wants to make the resurrection power of Christ his own, the reason he's doing that is because Christ has already made him his own. He's pursuing God because Christ has already pursued him. It's far from just being a matter of achievements or works. Paul is saying that

what motivates him to strive towards Christ is that he's already owned by Christ. What motivates him to strive for the righteousness, to make that his own, is that he has already been made righteous by Christ.

This is a profound truth in the center of kingdom life that we need to internalize. It reframes everything if we get it down right. Everything we do for God is a reflection of what God has already done towards us; everything. If you are pursuing God, it's because God has already pursued you. If you love God, it's because God first loved you. Everything we do towards God is a reflection of the grace he has already given to us. He is holding us in his hand. If we are reaching out to God, it's not because we're righteous. No! It's because God has already reached out to us. In fact, he's holding us in this embrace. I get this picture when I read this passage of Paul saying, "I want everything about him to be mine because everything about me is already his." I get this picture; I see myself being held by Jesus, and I'm this little kid. As I was as a little kid, I'm real rebellious. So he's holding me because he loves me. He's got this bear hug around me. He's pulling me towards himself, but I'm going, "No! No, I want to go my own way! I want to do my own thing. I want to be lord of my own life. I like to have my life apart from you." So I'm struggling against him, and he's pulling me towards himself. He's a little bit stronger than me, ha-ha, and so, as he's pulling me, what happens is that I start to buckle under; and, gradually, my resistance breaks down and, as he pulls me in his love, my heart begins to melt. As he pulls me in his love, I begin to have affection towards him. As he pulls me in his love, the light of Christ begins to go on, and I stop seeing the things of the world as having this attraction, and I stop wanting them so much. As he pulls me tightly in his love, I begin to want to pursue him and chase after him. Then I'm pursuing him, and I'm pressing on, and I want more Christ likeness, and I want to look more like Jesus. The only reason I'm doing it is because he's had me in a bear hug all along. The fact that I'm going after him is just evidence of the fact that he's already gone after me, and he already owns me. Everything, every inch of progress we make in our walk with God, we've got to say yes to it, but it's all a function of God's grace pulling us towards himself. If you have a little more light now than you did before, it's because God's been holding you all along. If you are getting a little bit more free of your pride, then that's because Jesus Christ has got a hold on you. If you are getting free of some of the bondages you've had in your life, that's because Jesus Christ has a hold on you. If you are learning how to love your spouse a little better than you did before and love your kids a little better than you did before, it's because Jesus Christ has his loving hold on you. If you are learning how to serve a little bit more and love your enemies a little bit better and forgive a little quicker, it's because Jesus Christ has got a bear hug around you, and he's pulling you to himself. No, we don't earn anything. We don't achieve anything. It's all by his grace. It's all by his grace; all by his grace. But, folks, we do have to say yes. What we do, we don't do to try to earn anything. We don't do stuff to get heaven. No! We do stuff because he's already given us heaven. We don't do stuff to

try to get righteous. We do it because he's already made us righteous. That puts in us a hunger to now actually make the righteousness characterize our life; to make it our own here and now.

The final thing I want us to reflect on is just this, as we prepare for communion. Paul has got this passion to press on and grow and go further down the road towards completeness. Realize that he's writing this in prison. He's in prison when he's writing this thing. It's curious as it's wonderful. The letter to the Philippians, I think, is the most joyous letter in the entire New Testament, and Paul is writing it in prison facing possible execution. This guy is just as happy as could be. What really impresses me here this morning is that he's in prison, and he doesn't know how long he's got to live. Maybe tonight is going to be his light night. This might be the last letter he's going to write. This could be the last sentence he's going to write. What's on his mind? "I want to press on. I'm not complete yet, no, I'm not complete, so I've got to grow." Here he is in prison! He's telling us he's not complete, but he wants to be complete, so he's going to press in on this. Here he is in prison saying, "I want to be more like Christ, I want to love more like Christ, I want to live more like Christ." Here he is in prison saying, "I've got to press on. I've got to be growing in my spiritual maturity. I've got to press on and manifest more of the kingdom." Right there in prison facing possible execution, he is saying, "I want to be the radiant bride who is fit to be married to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. I want to press on." He's got a passion and urgency about this. Could be with his last breath. So, I'm thinking, is Paul at the end of his life? The Apostle Paul; whom God used to inspire so many letters in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul who planted all these churches and was the hero of the faith; if he at the end of his life was saying, "I'm not complete yet, I've got to press on," I'm thinking it's, probably, a rather-safe bet that most people hearing this message or the one giving this message are, probably, not yet there, either. We've got more growth that needs to happen. We've got more to press in on, more that needs to change. So, if Paul had no space in his life to become complacent and to coast and to say, "good enough," if he had no place for that, then, folks, I submit to you that we have no place for this. See, God is always pulling us, and if we are yielding to that, then we will always be pursuing him. Seek first the kingdom of God.

So, I want us to think about this as the worship team comes up here and we prepare to enter into this second time of worship, as we prepare for this, think about this.

Number 1: Are you willing to press on? Let's be honest. A part of us, our fallen nature, we like complacency. That's why this acquittal model, this legal model of salvation kind of fits. We like it because if you are just acquitted, if that's all that matters, you can just be an acquitted couch potato waiting to die and go to heaven, which is where a lot of people are at. No, no, no, no. This salvation thing is about being a dance partner, a marriage partner with Jesus Christ.

Do you want to press on? Be honest about it. If, really, you don't, this is a part of me that doesn't, I like my complacent life, I'm comfortable, good enough. Part of me wants to say good enough. But, if you find that you don't really want to, then be honest about that, but don't try to crank that out: "I'm going to want to, I'm going to want to. I ought to, should, I ought to better," because that can loop you into this "doing" stuff. Rather, realize that Jesus Christ is pulling you. So, just submit your heart and just say, "Lord I don't want, but I want to want. Lord just change my heart." That's the first step, always. Just bend your heart and become humble and say, "Lord I'm such a sinner that I don't really want, but I want to want; so will you change my heart?" Then, let him pull you and feel that pull. Then, as we feel the pull, that loving hug, that bear hug around us this morning, as we feel that, let the Holy Spirit put in your mind one thing. There may be others later on but, right now, one thing that he wants you to press in on this year. We've all got at least one thing. Let the Holy Spirit put that in your mind and put that in your heart, and that is where you say with the Lord that, "I, in the power of your grace, will change." So, one year from now that won't be here or that will be here, whatever the case may be. Whatever it is that God wants you to work on. All right? Let's bend our hearts to Jesus. Let him pull us. Let him put on our hearts what it is that we're supposed to change. Don't let your flesh, carnal, petty brain talk you out of it. Like, "Oh, I couldn't possibly do that." This isn't about you or your power. It's about learning how to rely on his power. So, if he puts it in your mind, you can do it. Not on your own, but through the power of his grace working in your life. That bear hug. He's stronger than you are. He's stronger. He's going to pull you. He's going to pull you big if you let him.

We'll start by taking up an offering, and then I'll come up afterwards and set the stage for our taking communion. Will the ushers come forward as we pray?

Father, we submit all we have to you because it all comes from you and it all belongs to you. Part of the road you call us to travel down is a road of even financial suffering some times. Not just because of a bad economy but because we are living with outrageous generosity. So, lead us and guide us to steward the resources the way you want, and we just submit the ministry to you and the needs of the ministry and trust that you will be working in people's hearts to meet those needs. It all belongs to you because it's all about you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So, we're going to go and enter into a time of communion here; worship and communion. I encourage you throughout this time to have your mind solely focused on Jesus. Imagine in your mind the things we are singing about and the one we are singing to and offer it all up to him. Along the side of the auditorium we have tables with the cup and the bread. When you feel

ready, just get up and go and take the communion. If you want to do it with family or friends that are with you, then do it as a group. We encourage that. We at Woodland Hills have what they call, "open communion," which is simply that we don't screen anybody. We invite everybody to come and participate in this if you want. Jesus didn't give a theological litmus test on the last supper, and Judas was there! So, we don't believe in giving a theological litmus test. Join us in taking communion. This is the sign of the covenant. Whenever God gave a covenant in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, he gave a sign to remember it. So, the night which he was betrayed, that last supper, he took the bread, and he broke it in front of them, and he said, "This bread is my body, which is to be broken for you, and so whenever you come together and eat this bread, do it in remembrance of me." Remember the broken body. And then he took the cup, and he said, "This cup is the cup of the new and everlasting covenant because this cup is my blood that is shed for you. So, whenever you take the cup and drink of it, do it in remembrance of me." The blood that was shed for us. So, we remember the sacrifice he made; God becoming a human being, dying on the cross. He did this so that we could be invited into this marriage covenant with him. It's a marriage. So, it is his pledge to us. Also, a covenant involves another party, and that's us. So, this is where we, as we remember the covenant, we remember our pledge to make him Lord, which means our pledge is to walk down that road of suffering. Our pledge is to keep pressing on. So, as we take this cup, remember the love, the sacrifice, the love that is pulling you every step of the way, but also keep in mind that one thing that the Holy Spirit, maybe, is putting on your mind to change this year, to press in on this year, and offer that up to him. He died for us; our job is to die to ourselves for him.

So, Holy Spirit, come, invade this time, flood us with your Holy Spirit, God, just do things here. Do things here. Heal people here. Restore people here. Set a fire to our hearts here. Just fall on us, Lord God. Fall on us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Praise him! Praise him! Amen! Praise him for taking us through this last year, for heading us into this new year, for his grace always surrounding us, for always pulling us, pouring his spirit on us, we praise him. We praise him. Praise God!

We appreciate all you folks. I'm feeling God's presence here. If you don't want to leave, don't feel like you have to leave. The prayer teams are going to be up here if you want to come forward. I feel like God's presence is really here in a beautiful way, so if you want to stay and hover, stay and hover. Otherwise, I encourage us as we leave this place to do it with a commitment to press in, to press on, to press forward. Wherever we are at in our walk, we've got more room to grow, more things that need to be done. He wants a bride who is radiant and who is washed clean and blameless. So, let his love pull you. This year, make a commitment to

pull you in one area or two areas that he put on your mind, let him pull you, let him pull you.
Keep growing. Never stop. Never get complacent. Let the fire burn. Let the fire burn and go out
and share it with the world. In Jesus' name. Amen! Amen!