

Friends of the Cross

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- [0 : 0 0] This is Philippians chapter 3, and we are starting at verse number 12, and then we are going down through verse number 1 of chapter 4, okay?
- Chapter 3, 12, down through verse 1. 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 to God in Christ Jesus.
- Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if anything, you think otherwise. God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.
- Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many of whom I have often told you, and now tell you, even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.
- [1 : 0 3] Their end is destruction, their God is their belly, and they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things. 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. Thanks, Mike. Kids, let me ask you a question.
- When you are looking for a friend, and I see some of you are sitting near your friends, so I expect this will be an easy question. When you are looking for a friend, what are you looking for?
- Do you have an idea, Alice? It's okay. You can share it with us. Huh? Yeah, you're looking for a friend. But what do you want your friend to be like? Like Audrey?
- Okay. There you go. Evelyn? Kind? Trustworthy? Yes? The same humor? Is that what you said? That is good.
- [2 : 2 0] You do not want to make jokes that other people don't get the same jokes. You don't want to be laughing at inappropriate times. I do that sometimes. And then it's like, that's not good. Okay? Kylie? Kylie? Nice?
- Yep. We want someone who is kind and nice. Anybody else? I don't want to leave anybody out who wants to share something about their friend. Okay? So kindness and trustworthiness and someone that you can laugh with and someone just like Audrey, these are the qualities that make someone enjoyable to be with as a friend.
- And the interesting thing is that this translates fairly well for us as adults too, doesn't it? We want someone who is kind. We want someone trustworthy. We want someone who's nice. We want someone we can laugh with and go have a good time with.
- These are the types of things that friends need to share in order for the friendship to last. I wonder if you noticed a phrase as Mike was reading.

There's a phrase kind of in the center of this text. Paul talks about the enemies of the cross. The enemies of the cross. That little phrase caught my attention this week and it made me wonder, what would define a friend of the cross?

[3 : 41] Like we talk about friendship and what would go into being a good friend. But what would it be like to be a friend of the cross?

A friend of the cross needs the humility to join Jesus' story arc. Is that right? To get themselves on Jesus' story arc.

Be willing to be there by the Spirit's power and ride out the story arc of Jesus. Even though it drops down again and again into suffering. Perhaps disappointment.

Perhaps persecution. We ride on that story arc. Matching our story arc with Jesus. Friends of the cross will see service and suffering and sacrifice not as setbacks.

Not as setbacks to life but as opportunities to be made more like Jesus. Enemies of the cross tend to pursue this rags to riches story arc that Ryan taught us about a few weeks back.

[5 : 00] It's like Aladdin, right? The rags to riches story arc. Or maybe like Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, right? Starting from nothing and going somewhere.

Really amazing. But that's the path of the enemies of the cross. Service and suffering and sacrifice do not fit into that story arc very well, do they?

Enemies of the cross demand that their desires are met. Enemies of the cross want to satisfy their own cravings. Enemies of the cross fight to get what they want.

Enemies of the cross fight to win at all costs. And they have to control every situation around them. Enemies of the cross, Paul will tell us in just a moment, they're short-sighted.

They focus on the here and now. They're concerned about comfort in their immediate circumstances. These are the enemies of the cross.

[6 : 15] When Paul writes about the enemies of the cross, I find this so interesting. He gets emotional and it sounds as though this is not the first time that he has had this conversation with the Philippians.

Look in your Bible at verse 18. For I have often told you. Sounds like this was a theme that Paul had to keep coming back to again and again.

For I have often told you and now say again with tears. That many live as enemies of the cross.

Their end is destruction. Their God is their stomach. Their glory is their shame. They are focused on earthly things.

Do you see that there in your Bible? These descriptors of the enemies of the cross? Now it's possible that Paul has a specific group in mind here. It's possible that he is thinking about the Judaizers.

[7 : 22] Those who have abandoned grace by insisting that Christians obey parts of God's law that are not binding on followers of Jesus. It may be that he has in mind unbelievers who are making life difficult for the Philippians.

Ostracizing them. Blacklisting them. Making it difficult for them to do business and to be part of social gatherings. It may be that he has those people in mind. And it may also be that Paul has in mind well-meaning Christians who have a corrupt view of what it means to follow Jesus.

And their view is corrupt in this way. They are teaching that you can have victory over all sin, weakness, and failure this side of being with Jesus.

They teach that you can arrive at some kind of perfection apart from being with Jesus.

I want us to notice how Paul makes some contrasts between the fleshly, in other words, the self-centered, short-sighted, glory-seeking behaviors of the enemies of the cross with what he expects from the Philippians.

[8 : 40] Look at these contrasts. They start in verse number 12. Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it, of the goal, because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. Of what? Of the goal, of the prize, of being like Jesus. But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

I love Paul's disclaimers in this text. I find his disclaimers to be so relatable. I wonder if you relate to these. He says this.

He says this. Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect. I haven't arrived yet. Anyone as much like Jesus as you want to be?

Anyone been as much like Jesus this week as you want to be? That's okay. You know why? We're in good company with the Apostle Paul. Because that's what he says. I haven't arrived.

[10 : 05] I haven't reached this goal yet. See how these are relatable? Look in verse 13. I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it.

In other words, I still need the Holy Spirit to teach me how to be like Jesus. Anyone want to agree with Paul? You still need the Holy Spirit to teach you to be like Jesus?

We are in good company with the Apostle Paul. None of us have arrived spiritually. None of us have graduated from the school of grace with a degree in Jesus.

Is that fair? There's a gap that still exists between us and being like Jesus. And I want to make this so clear. This is not a relational gap between us and Jesus.

Paul has already taught us we are in Christ. Christ is in us. We have a relationship with God because of the finished work of Jesus.

[11 : 07] We have Christ's righteousness as our own righteousness. So the gap is not a relational gap. The gap is a likeness gap.

A likeness gap. We don't look like Jesus the way that we should. We don't talk like Jesus the way that we should. We don't respond like Jesus consistently the way that we should.

This is the gap that I would like to talk about a little more. Let me illustrate this if I can. When I'm thinking of this likeness as contrasted with this relational gap, I don't want us to get this wrong.

Think of a baby. A freshly newborn baby. This baby is never going to be more related to the mom and the dad than that baby is, right?

Like it is tightly connected relationally to those parents. And yet there is a gap that exists between that baby looking like those parents.

[12 : 11] Now we can all do this, right? The baby comes out and you're like, oh, it's so cute. You look just like your dad. Nope, you don't look just like your dad. Why not? Because you're like nine inches long, right?

You don't look just like your dad. And none of us expect the babies to come out able to do multiplication. Who's learning multiplication facts? Yes, you do not expect a newborn baby to be able to do multiplication.

Or to say, how can I help to prepare the meal tonight? Wouldn't that be weird if suddenly little Kenzie said, I wonder what I can do around here to help get some food on the table?

We would all think that was strange, right? Now, she's never more sweet, right? But she's not able to help prepare the meal.

Not yet. There's a gap that exists between her and her mom and dad being like them where she's able to do these things and eat chips and chocolate cake and help prepare the dinner.

[13 : 16] What does Paul do when he recognizes this gap that exists? What does he do? Is he going to wallow in analysis paralysis over past sin and weakness and failure?

Is Paul going to pull himself up by the self-righteous bootstraps? Is Paul going to give in to let go and let God laziness?

The answer to all three of these questions is no. Paul has given us his disclaimers. And now I want you to see his declarations, okay? We have his disclaimers.

We know that he's acknowledged. He is not yet like Christ. He's not as much like Jesus as he wants to be. He's not as Jesus-y as he should be yet. Those are his disclaimers.

Now notice his declarations. Because this is how friends of the cross respond when we recognize that there is a gap between us and Jesus.

[14 : 22] Look at verse 12. Again, the second half of verse 12. I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus.

I make every effort. I spare no energy to take hold of it. What is it? The goal of being more and more like Jesus.

Do you notice the grace that is embedded in this phrase? I noticed this just before we gathered and we all got in our rows and sat for worship.

And at the risk of using her name for a second time, that's why she was on my mind. This is what happened. Kenzie reaches out her hands to her mom, right?

But can Kenzie put herself in her mom's arms? No, she can't, can she? What needs to happen? Her mom reaches down and grabs her and picks her up.

[15 : 32] Now what does Kenzie do when she's in her mom Jenny's arms? I watched it happen. She put her arm around her mom's neck. She's holding on, right? Kenzie's holding on to Jenny.

But who's really holding on? Jenny is really holding on, isn't she? She's the one who's making sure that Kenzie stays close. Do you see that here in this text?

It's the same idea. Paul says, I make every effort to take hold of being like Jesus. But while I am making every effort, it's actually Jesus who has taken hold of me.

And Jesus is holding on to me. This is grace-propelled effort.

This is effort that doesn't come from ourselves because it's Jesus who's holding on to us. But we make every effort.

[16 : 35] We hold on to Jesus. We pursue the prize of being more and more like Jesus. But all the while, it's Jesus who is holding on to us.

Do you see that there in your Bible? Don't miss that. What an important truth for us to know. Look at the second half of verse number 13. Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead.

Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead. Imagine that you're running track and that you jump over a hurdle.

You know what a hurdle is? Some of you don't know. Okay. A hurdle is like the things that they put in the track. And then it's a race where you run and you jump over hurdles.

So it's a running and a jumping at the same time. Now, sometimes what happens when you are jumping over a hurdle is that you won't jump high enough.

[17 : 39] Right? And you're going to knock over the hurdle. What happens if you knock over a hurdle? What are you going to do? And you're running a race. You might trip. But if you don't trip, what should you do?

You should not set the hurdle back up. Not if you want to win. That is very gracious. Not if you want to win the race. You should keep going. You should keep running.

And then when you finish, you can come back and set up the hurdle if you want. Right? Because here's what happens. There's another hurdle that's coming. You're going to have to jump over another one.

And if you stop and you turn around and you look at that hurdle that you have knocked down, and you're so frustrated with yourself, and you say, I can't believe I knocked over another hurdle.

You are not going to win this race. You are not going to get the prize. Right? What does Paul say? He forgets those things that are behind.

[18 : 40] He forgets his sin and his weakness and his failure in the past so that he can reach forward to what is ahead. You think you have sin, weakness, and failure in your life?

You ever participate in killing another Christian? I don't suppose any of us have done that, or you'd be in jail probably, right? Paul participated in killing other Christians.

He has all kinds of sin and weakness and failure in his life. He could just be so self-absorbed with guilt and brokenness over what he's done, and just land himself in analysis paralysis and look at his history and think, I can't believe what a failure I have been.

Look at what I have done. No. Paul says, I forget those things that are behind so that I can reach forward to what is ahead.

What do we do with our guilt? What do we do with guilt? We don't let guilt make us self-absorbed, depressed, broken down, paralyzed.

[19 : 56] No, we allow guilt to be the work of the Holy Spirit that moves us towards the grace that is ours in Christ Jesus. We remember, listen, listen, we remember that Jesus is holding on to us, that we have not fallen out of his arms.

This is grace-propelled effort that is undistracted by past failure.

Verse 14, Paul continues, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

What's Paul say? Keep your head up. Don't be distracted by what's behind or by what those around you are going to say. Keep your eyes on the prize and keep moving.

Why? Because being made more like Jesus takes time. Closing this gap in likeness does not happen in a moment.

[21 : 03] It happens little by little, progressively, like a baby progressively gets bigger and bigger and smarter and smarter. Soon they're able to talk and soon they're able to do addition and subtraction and multiple.

And pretty soon they're able to help prepare some food, right? That's the goal, to get our kids to where they can prepare some of their own meals, go out and be on your own, do your own life, right?

That's part of our goal. But not at first. And this happens little by little by little. And this is a challenge that this happens little by little.

And here's why. Because we don't all mature at the same pace. We don't all spiritually mature at the same pace.

Just like all babies don't physically mature at the same pace, we don't all spiritually mature at the same pace. And the Holy Spirit might be doing something in your life that He's not doing yet in my life.

[22 : 10] Perhaps He's working on some other brokenness inside of me. But meanwhile, He's moving you forward in a particular way. This could create some conflict, couldn't it?

Because you might start looking at me kind of judgy, and I might kind of start looking at you kind of judgy, and we might find that we have ourselves some conflict. And Paul anticipates that this might be the case.

Look at what he says. Notice how he continues his theme of unity through humility. Verse 15. Therefore, let all of us who are mature think this way.

And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you. Now, don't read this and think that Paul is saying, you can just take or leave my teaching.

He's not saying that this is a take it or leave it. And he's also not saying, you do what I say or else. You might read this verse and kind of land at either one of those positions.

[23 : 19] That's not what Paul is driving at here. Another Paul, David Tripp, says this. He says, patience loves process.

Patience loves process. And so Paul instructs the Philippians here in verse 15. You need to make space among yourselves for disagreement.

You need to give time for others to come to shared conclusions. You need to give space for the Holy Spirit to be working in your heart in a way that he may not be working in everyone else's heart yet.

You need to trust the Spirit to reveal truth rather than resorting to ultimatums. You've heard me describe something like this as the humility to learn, the wisdom to discern, and the grace to disagree.

I may be wrong. You may have more to learn, and neither one of us have arrived at the prize, which is Christlikeness. Patience loves process.

[24 : 43] And practice makes progress. Sometimes we say practice makes perfect, don't we? I'm not really sure that that's true, that practice makes perfect.

But I do know this. Practice makes progress. When you practice, you ought to get better. Look at verse 16.

In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained. Whatever truth the Holy Spirit reveals to you, live up to that.

Whatever sin the Holy Spirit convicts you of, you repent of that sin. When you realize that there is some Holy Spirit fruit that is lacking in your life, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to produce that particular fruit in your life.

It may be patience for parenting. It may be patience for parenting that you need. It may be joy at work that you need.

[25 : 51] It may be gentleness with your wife that you need. It may be peace with your husband that you need.

It may be goodness with extended family members that you need. It may be self-control with spending or social media or some other vice that captures your attention.

Whatever it is that you realize is missing when the Holy Spirit makes it clear, there's this fruit that needs to be produced. Ask the Holy Spirit to produce that particular fruit.

I think that's part of what Paul is driving at here. Whatever we should live up to, whatever truth we have attained. Don't use a lack of understanding as an excuse for immaturity.

Whatever truth you have, at minimum, live up to that truth. Just like we don't expect a child to make a gourmet five-course meal, we also don't expect adults to play with Barbie dolls for eight hours a day.

[27 : 01] Is that true? We don't expect little ones to make gourmet meals, and we don't expect adults to play with children's toys for a living.

That's not unusual. That's not normal, right? And so, whatever truth the Spirit reveals, live up to that truth.

Why? Because practice makes progress. There's a final descriptor of Friends of the Cross, and this one I think may be easy for us to overlook, but it's in verse 17.

Join in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and pay careful attention to those who live according to the example you have in us.

Now, this very first word of this verse is unknown outside of Scripture. And that means that Paul may have invented it.

[28 : 09] We call that coining a term. He may have invented this word. Here's what he does. He takes the noun imitator. You with me?

He takes the noun imitator, and he adds the prefix with to the front of the word imitator. He wants with imitators.

What does this mean? Well, it means what the translators try to give us here. Join in imitating. He wants this work of pursuing being like Jesus to be a community project.

We need one another. We need to commit to one another in community. So we join. We are with imitators.

Remember how you win a three-legged race? Friendship with the cross necessitates intentional community.

[29 : 28] He says, pay careful attention to. If you remember back up in verse 4 of chapter 2, he says, don't look to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

He's using the same word here. Pay careful attention to the interests of others. Here he says, pay careful attention to others.

To those who live according to this. What is he saying? Be with other followers of Jesus. Study their lives. Observe their character.

Be a student of their spiritual growth. Watch and imitate how they respond to celebration and to suffering and to ordinary experiences in life.

Watch them. Observe them. And then pattern your life after them. Friendship with the cross necessitates intentional community.

[30 : 32] When you are able to say with Paul, I have not arrived. When you're able to say with Paul, I have not arrived.

I am still needing the Holy Spirit to teach me how to follow Jesus. That humility makes you an example, not of perfection, but of progress in pursuing the prize that is promised to us in Christ Jesus.

So we can reject the beliefs and the behaviors of the enemies of the cross. We can stop seeking to satisfy our own cravings.

We can give up the needs to defend our rights. We can release our white knuckle fingers that cling to control. We can repent of our desire to win.

We cannot be distracted by our puny little life goals. We can reject all of that and instead seek to be a friend of the cross.

[31 : 39] We merge our story arc with Jesus's and we learn the way of suffering. And that means grace-propelled effort, undistracted by past failure, that progressively pursues God's promise of being made more like Jesus within intentional community.

Let's admit it, brothers and sisters. Let's just admit it. There is a gap that exists between me and Jesus. And there's a gap that exists between you and Jesus.

Not a relational gap. A likeness gap. We are not as Jesus-y as we ought to be. But listen, by the Holy Spirit's power and God's grace to us in Christ, we are more Jesus-y today than we were six months ago.

Is that true? I hope that's true. We are more Jesus-y today than we were six months ago. What is going to sustain us in this pursuit of the prize of being more like Jesus?

What is going to sustain us when we realize this is happening much more slowly than I would have liked? What is going to sustain us when we realize I've knocked over another hurdle.

[33 : 08] My sin, my weakness, and my failure has broken me down again. What's going to sustain us in keeping our eyes on the prize? And the answer, which won't surprise you, is the gospel.

Look down in your Bible at verse 20. Our citizenship is in heaven, and we wait eagerly for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself.

Did you know that you have a second home? And I'm not talking about a lake home or a place in Arizona that is free from all of this snow. Follower of Jesus, you have an address in heaven.

Your real citizenship is in heaven with Jesus. And because you are a citizen of this heavenly kingdom, you are waiting for your King.

[34 : 25] Anticipating your King. And our King is also our Savior. It's the one, Jesus, who humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross, not for His sin, not for His weakness, not for His failure, for your sin, weakness, and failure.

It's no surprise that we're awaiting a Savior. We're eager to see Him. We are anticipating the return of Jesus.

And this is what motivates us to keep on pursuing the prize of being made more and more like Him. King Jesus, King Jesus has big plans for you, follower of Jesus.

Transformational plans. He's going to take this broken down body that you have and give you a body like His that is gloriously healed, wonderfully whole, not even practically perfect like Mary Poppins, but perfectly perfect in every way as God intends your body to be.

And it is with this transformation in mind, knowing that we are anticipating the return of our King, who is also our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, that Paul restates his exhortation.

[35 : 57] But I want you to notice it is not before he piles up a whole bunch of adjectives about every follower of Jesus. Look at verse 1. So then, my dearly loved, dearly loved, your Bible may say beloved, my dearly loved, loved, my longed for, my brothers and sisters, my joy, my crown, in other words, my reward.

Paul says, you, all of you, when I get to heaven someday, you are the reward. Seeing you there in heaven, you are the reward that I am looking forward to.

These are all of the adjectives that Paul piles up for every follower of Jesus. And then he says this, in this manner, stand firm in the Lord, my dear friends.

friends. Friend, you are not ultimately defined by your earthly circumstances.

You are not ultimately defined by a medical diagnosis, by a living arrangement that you didn't choose, by shattered dreams or broken relationships.

[37 : 22] You are not ultimately defined by a career change or by piles of regret like dirty snow in the parking lots. You are not ultimately defined by those things.

If you are a follower of Jesus, then your citizenship is in heaven and you are so dearly loved by your Savior and he can't wait to have you with him for all eternity.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that, brother and sister? This is what is going to motivate us to press on for the prize of being more like Jesus.

Until that day when we see Jesus, would you join me in reimagining our daily priorities and our commitments? Reimagining our values, our dreams, our life goals, reimagining our emotional health, our relationships, reimagine all of these in the light of these glorious gospel promises.

Keep your eyes on the prize, brothers and sisters. Fix your eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how, my dearly loved ones, this is how we stand firm in the Lord as friends of the cross.

[38 : 46] Let's pray. Amen. Father, your word is so good and we confess that it is true and we acknowledge that the gap that exists between us and Jesus is not as a result of your unwillingness to work in our hearts.

It is not because of a lack of Holy Spirit power. It is not for any deficit of your grace. we confess that there is still sin and weakness and failure inside of us because we wrestle with this fleshly part of us that remains.

This old man, this flesh that is deep down inside. And yet, your word gives us such incredible promises, such amazing hope, and you are so full of such glorious grace grace.

And blessed Holy Spirit, you have wonderful, abundant power to pour out into our lives. So Holy Spirit, would you do some work right now and help us to be aware of some places where you need to do work, where perhaps we have been paralyzed by sin or weakness or failure, where perhaps we are not pursuing the prize, or perhaps we have pulled ourselves up by our self-righteous bootstraps and we need to yield to your grace and your goodness and remember that it is only by your power.

Would you do this work in our hearts as we are quiet before you for a few moments? Father, we are grateful that the King that we are anticipating is also the Savior who loved us and laid down his life for us.

[40 : 48] We are grateful to be recipients of grace and forgiveness and to know that we have in Christ everything, everything, everything your word tells us that we need for life and godliness.

Help us to believe that this is true and help us to live in obedience to you by the power of your Holy Spirit we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.