

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Pressing On Hand Crafted: In a Fast Food World

Dr. Scott Dudley  
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<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:10-14  
New International Version

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Jesus, we ask that you would teach us from that. You are the king of our hearts. You are good all the time. Lord, help us to learn from your word and be more like you. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Well, hello 9:45. Great to have you all here, as well as those of you who are watching online at home, or those of you in the eleven o'clock service, and our middle schoolers, and our high schoolers. Just thank you all for being here.

I saw a bumper sticker a while back that said, "If at first, you don't succeed, then skydiving isn't for you," which my sick sense of humor thought was really funny, right? It actually sort of also makes a kind of a profound point, because as you know, the actual saying is, "Try, try again." Do you ever have a hard time doing that? Do you ever have a hard time persevering toward some goal? Do you ever find yourself getting discouraged?

All of us have goals that we're moving toward. Whether we know it or not, whether we admit it or not, all of us have goals. Maybe it's a school goal, to get a certain GPA, or go to a certain college, or just to graduate. Or a sports goal, or career goals, or a goal to have a good marriage, or raise great kids, or grow in your faith. Those goals can take years to achieve. When we're working towards something, there's often setbacks. Some of them are big setbacks. Some of them are small setbacks.

I remember when I was ... This will kind of date me, but I remember when I was working on my Master's thesis. It was the late 80's, and I was like the only person in the country still using a typewriter and didn't have a computer. I know some of you don't know what a typewriter is, so just go home and google it. It was an ancient torture device. My goal was to finish it. I had worked on this thing for months, and at one point, I borrowed a friend's car, because I didn't have one for a day or two. I went to meet him for lunch to give him his car back and I had the thesis in my car. When we came out of the restaurant, the car had been towed. I said, "Who towed my

## Pressing On

thesis?" My friend was like, "Who cares? My car! Who towed my car?" It took a couple of weeks to get the car back, to get my thesis back. That was a minor setback toward a goal.

Sometimes we face major setbacks toward different goals that we have. Here's the thing, any goal worth achieving is probably going to take years to achieve. It's just going to take time. How do we keep going in the face of discouragement and persevere toward a worthy goal? I'm going to ask you seven questions that come from the text that we just read that can help keep us moving toward our goals, and then after the seven questions there'll be a PS. You just pick a couple of the questions that seem most relevant to you today. Some of these points will be very brief, so if your heart sank at the thought of a seven-point sermon, don't worry. You'll still get out of here on time.

Okay. Question number one, have you submitted your goal to Jesus? The Apostle Paul says in this text, says, "Not that I have already obtained all of this or arrived at my goal, but I press on." In context, the all of this refers to getting closer to Jesus, but in the Greek, there is no all of this. The translators just threw that in there. It actually says, "Not that I have already obtained." Leaving the goal kind of unspecified, which leaves room for all kinds of goals, spiritual goals, yes, but any other kind of goal. Career, or school, or relationship goals.

His point is that in all of this, Jesus needs to be central. That is rather than try to fit Jesus into our goal; the real question is, does our goal fit into Jesus' plans? He says, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." Jesus takes hold of us for a purpose. You were made on purpose for a purpose. God's purposes can be fulfilled in any goal that you are pursuing. When we submit our goals to Jesus, he may alter our goals; he may change our goals completely. He may shape them and kind of tweak them. He may change how we go about achieving them. Are you praying, Jesus shows me how you want to use my education, career, relationship goals in your rescue mission to the world?

Some of you right now might be thinking, "Well, man, my goal is just to lose five pounds, like do I really have to make that like a Jesus thing, you know? Like what if he tells me to lose 10 pounds instead, right? That'd be harder." Here's the thing. Even if you submit a goal like that to Jesus, he can use it. He can work with you. Maybe to expose motives, like is this for health reasons? Or are you just trying to fit a cultural expectation? Maybe you don't need to be losing that weight. Or maybe if you do lose that weight, Jesus is going to help you do that in a way that is free from those cultural pressures and shows how to be free from that to others.

There's a man in our church, I'll call him Sean, who was part of Cascade Fellows program here, which helps people know how to integrate faith and work in meaningful ways, beyond just having a bible on your desk. Sean worked in wealth management, usually for big institutions, or very wealthy individuals, but during the 2008 recession, Sean just saw a lot of people really hurting through that. He began to ask the question, "Am I using my gifts to the highest good?" He got discouraged about his industry and wanted to quit, but his wife kept saying, "No, you're good at this. You can help people with this." He started interviewing different companies, and he ran across one that was really different. Their motto was, "Do right and fear not."

Sean discovered that they were a different kind of wealth management firm. Whereas a lot of firms won't take you as a client, unless you make a certain amount of money, this firm takes anyone and tries to do the best for them no matter how much money they have. Sean started to work there. One of his clients was a missionary who only had \$30,000 to invest. Other firms wouldn't have "wasted their

## Pressing On

time" on her, but to God, she's not a waste of time. Sean worked with her to help her make the best of her investments.

One of the things Sean is most happy about is that one of his best friends did three tours in Iraq, then got married and had kids, and he was looking for a life insurance, but he had a poor score, so he wanted to wait a year and get into better shape and then look again. Sean convinced him to get the life insurance anyway, and then get in shape and then get retested for a better score, but get it, anyway. Three months later, this guy died. Suddenly died, unexpected, but his wife and kids were taken care of because of Sean.

Prior to the recession, Sean never thought that God was calling him to wealth management. He didn't see that as like a mission field, but he submitted his career goals to Jesus, which shaped his goals and now he sees that God is at work in his work as a financial advisor. That has given him extra motivation to persevere because he sees meaning, a deeper meaning in it and there's deeper purpose. When we submit our goals to Jesus, he changes them. They have more purpose, more meaning that helps us persevere.

Question number two, are you praying about your goal? Not, "Jesus, help me reach my goal, amen," but, "Jesus, is this a goal I should even have? Is this your goal? Or is this my idea, Jesus? If it's yours, or if you're in it, then how do you want to use it?" Then, you've got to leave space for God to talk to those thoughts that maybe aren't our thoughts, or images, or nudges.

Last weekend at the men's retreat, the speaker, Alexis, who pastors the Rwandan church upstairs, says he's noticed something. That often as Christians we'll sit in meetings and spend five minutes praying about a problem, and then two hours trying to solve the problem. He said, "Jesus would spend two hours praying, and then solve the problem in five minutes." When he said that, I thought, "Oh, I hope he didn't come to that conclusion by watching how I lead meetings because that's sometimes ... that's often what I do." Are you praying about your goal earnestly? God shape me, shape it, guide it.

Question number three, are you vectoring? I don't even know if that's a verb, but I'm going to use it anyways. Paul says, "One thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, I press on." One thing I do. Laser focused on his goal. Sometimes I'll say to young people who are just starting a family, I'll say, "Okay, you're entering a danger zone in life. Beware the vector," and here's what I mean. Like a lot of us get married and start to have kids with every intention of loving our spouse the way Christ loves the church, and empowering them, and raising great kids who know Jesus. Nobody gets married thinking, "Gosh, I hope I really screw this up," but then we vector.

At first, it's just a little bit. Maybe just one degree off true north, right? Just a little bit. Maybe you're tired from work all the time, so you come home, and you just play with your kids really briefly and then just watch TV the rest of the night. Or maybe it's that you aren't quite as open with your spouse and slowly you start to talk about the logistics of home and kids more than what's going on in your heart, and so you lose intimacy. At first, it's just a degree or two off true north. It's just a little vector, but over time, that vector takes you to a place that you do not want to be.

An engineer told me this week that if you're only one degree off course, in just 1,000 feet, you will already be 17 feet off of where you were headed. Over time, that vector is damaging. I see this in college students. I saw it in the college students I taught. They'd come to college, hoping not to repeat the mistakes of high school, that they made in high school, but little by little, they vector and ended up where they did not want to be. We all vector, right? Again, I don't know if it's a verb, but I vector you

## Pressing On

vector. He or she vectors. We vector. They vector. They shall have vectored, whatever tense that is, right?

I do this, I vector all the time. I'm like Victor the Vectorer. This is how I know the danger of the vector because I have vectored. Here's the thing. If you take a wrong exit off the freeway of life, there's always an on ramp up ahead, and that would make a great country music song, right? Took a wrong exit on the freeway of life. I can just hear it, right? A little banjo in the background. Jesus can always get you back on track, and I'll give you an example in a minute.

Key to not vectoring is to stay focused on the long-term goal. One thing I do. I've told you before that when my kids were little, whenever I had to discipline them, I tried to just take a minute and think about my long-term goal. My short-term goal was some version of, "Why you little?" But long-term, I wanted them to grow up to honorable manhood and womanhood and know Jesus and all of that, so I would try to take a moment and think, "Okay, how I handle this moment will affect that goal, so how do I do this in a way that moves us toward that goal?" Sometimes I did it right, and sometimes I did it wrong. I still sometimes do it right, and I still sometimes do it wrong, and sometimes I don't even know what to do.

Recently ... well actually, it was a couple of years ago, one of my kids ... I won't say which one. One of my kids went through a phase where if I so much as walked in the room, said, "Child," would go, "Ugh," in a disgusted voice and then leave the room. I'm like, "I'm sorry for breathing." I didn't even know what to do with that. We all end up vectoring, because we don't know what to do, but are you trying to stay true north? You need friends and Jesus to keep you pointed true north. Avoid the vector.

Question four, are you rebuking the lies? Are you rebuking the lies? Paul says, "Forgetting what lies behind, I press on." Sometimes it's helpful to remember things from the past, like times when God has been faithful, but some things we need to forget. Things we need to forget, messages in the past from parents, peers, teachers that says, "You're not enough of this," and, "You're too much of that." We have to forget past mistakes because they weigh us down. A few verses before this, Paul talks about how he used to persecute Christians, but that he has been forgiven of that, and that he doesn't look back to that. Otherwise, those past mistakes will slow us down toward the goal.

You can't fix that marriage. It's too far gone. You can't beat that bad habit. Look at all the times you failed before. Paul here uses the image of a runner, and every runner knows you do not look back because that only slows you down in the race. Jesus paid the price for every sin we've sinned. They have been erased, so rebuke the lies from our past and move on.

I heard a lawyer named Steven tell a story of how his first job, he worked for a company where they put you on a year-long probationary period when you are hired. It's like a year-long job interview. A lot of people don't make it through that first year. He wanted to make a good impression, really make an impact. In his first case, he was called to court to help someone make bail. He went to court to meet his client. The client had brought a lot of family and friends to this hearing, and Steven did his best to argue for bail, but the judge was really harsh and didn't grant bail at all. Steven thought, "Great, here I want to make an impact and my first case I lose." Right then, his client elbowed both the security guards and ran out of the courtroom and his friends and family rushed into the courtroom and started wrestling with all the guards. Steven thought, "I am going to make an impact, just not the one I thought."

Then one of the client's friends turned to Steven and said, "Come over here and help." Steven's like, "I'm a lawyer, I don't wrestle with guards." He didn't know what

## Pressing On

to do, so he just slipped out of the courtroom, and when he got outside, the courthouse was surrounded by police, looking for his client. He just slunk back to his office. When he got there, one of the senior partners walked up to him and said, "Steven, how'd it go? Did he get out?" "Yes." Needless to say, he did not get to keep his job. He was let go, but that past failure did not hinder him from moving forward. He found a better job and kept moving forward. We have to forget past failures; they'll drag us down.

Sometimes we also have to forget past successes, because lots of people zero in on one good part of life and just try to relive it. High school, college, when we first married, or things like that. Now that we have a graduating senior in our house, in a fit of nostalgia, we've been watching home videos from when our kids were small. I look at them, and I think, "Oh, they were so little and cute back then and now they're all big and grown up and look how much hair I had. I had so much hair, I was so handsome. I was like a young Brad Pitt. Remember how much fun we had back then when they were little and small, and they didn't sleep through the night and they threw fits and diapers had to be changed." It's good to look back on good memories, but we can't camp there. There were problems back then too, just like there are problems now. Yes, it is true. Sometimes we are in a season in life where the past really was better.

I think of my mentor who had pancreatic cancer and eventually died. His past was better in a lot of ways, and he looked back on it with gratitude, but he didn't camp there. He allowed Jesus to empower him to move through that difficult season with supernatural joy that inspired people around him. Rebuke the lies of the past that say, "It was better then, and God's not working now," or, "Because of past failures, I can't go forward." Here's the thing. God never consults your past to determine your future. Your future rests with Jesus.

Question number five, question number five, are you progressing? Paul says, "Not that I've already arrived at my goal, but I press on." I haven't arrived. In other words, it's a journey. It's going to always be a journey, and the mark of a Christian is not perfection. It's progress. Are you progressing?

Question number six, are you facing reality? Paul says, "I want to know Christ and the participation in his sufferings." In other words, there is a cost to attaining my goal. There are costs to obtaining our goal, but we don't like to face those costs. We don't like to face what it's going to take from us, so we do a lot of reality avoidance. We do a lot of wishful thinking. A woman told me a while back that she went inside a dressing room in a clothing store and the sign on the mirror said, "Objects in mirror appear larger than they actually are." Okay, in a clothing store that's kind of wishful thinking maybe, right?

Here's the thing. We can't make things truly better, unless we face the truth of how things actually are and say, "I don't have to live like this. Jesus has better for me. There's a better way." It's like the old analogy of circus elephants. Many of you have heard it. It's got troubling things about treatment of animals but makes a good point. A man sees, at the circus, these huge elephants and they're kept from running away by this tiny, little rope that they could easily break. He asked the trainer, "Why don't they just break the rope and run away?" The trainer says, "Well, when they're babies, we use that rope to keep them from running away, and at that time they can't break it, so when they grow up, they still think they can't break it, so they don't even try."

Okay, that preaches. So often the devil convinces us that our current reality is just normal, and we're powerless against it, but Jesus gives us power to break the rope and be set free. In another kind of church that would have gotten an amen, so ... I heard a faint one over here, so thank you. I know. See, hope starts when we stop

## Pressing On

pretending the marriage is working when it isn't, and say, "My God has more for us than this. He can break the rope and set us free." Hope starts when we admit that yes, we are addicted to that substance or that habit, but Jesus can break the rope and set us free. Hope is when we stop pretending that the way I relate to people is just fine and dandy, even though there's always relational turmoil around me. Jesus can break the rope and set me free.

Which brings me to question seven, are you expecting Jesus' unexpected resurrection? Paul says, "I want to know Christ, yes and to know the power of his resurrection." Know there isn't head knowledge. It means to have an experience of Jesus' power, not just to think about theology. See, Paul understands that everything, your job, school, goals, everything, everything is just an opportunity to see Jesus at work and his power at work, but the thing about resurrection power is it's different than what we expect, or want.

You would expect that crucifying Jesus would have put a stop to his movement, but instead, it launched his movement. Resurrections are by definition often not what we expect, or want. There are seven questions. There are seven questions to ask, to keep us moving forward toward our goal. Which one of these seven questions, or several do you need to be asking yourself this week to help keep you moving forward? Then there's a PS. The PS is this. Remember the four P's of progress.

In the Bible, there is a repeated pattern of promise, problem, purpose, provision. Promise, problem, purpose, provision. God makes a promise. For instance Moses, "I'm going to set you and your people free from slavery in Egypt." Promise. The problem, Pharaoh won't let them go. The provision, ten plagues and he parts the Red Sea, and there was purpose in the problem. God doesn't always cause the problem, but he always uses the problem for a purpose. He, in this case, to help the Israelites see his power, to help them learn that he is not just a tribal deity of the Israelites alone. He is God of the entire world.

God makes promises to us. "I am with you always. I am making all things new. I will use hard things for your good." But we face problems, relationship problems, school problems, health problems, but there is purpose in the problem. Ask Jesus to help you find the purpose in the problem because when we see the purpose, we can persevere, knowing that the problem has a purpose and there will be a provision for patient Presbyterians progressing properly.

You know how many times I had to practice that one? That's real confidence. See that's real confidence because it's based on what Jesus can do, not on what I can do, not just on me. That's real confidence. Jesus can raise things from the dead. Two weeks ago, after I preached, someone pointed out to me that when I chose the title, I didn't think about how that title for the sermon would look when it was printed in the bulletin, so he brought it up to me and said, "Well, someone thinks a lot of himself." "The Greatest Miracle. Dr. Scott Dudley." Okay, not confidence like that confidence, okay? Not that kind of confidence. Confidence in the power of Jesus who raises all things from the dead.

I heard a man recently talk about how, for his whole life, he wanted to be a missionary in China, help people there in tangible, economic ways, as well as help them see Jesus. That was his goal, so he studied Chinese history in college. Learned to speak Mandarin. Found the money so that he could go, but it was in the 70's, and there was a lot of turmoil in China that prevented him from going. He got to Taiwan and was there a couple of years, but he didn't get to go to China. After a couple of years of Taiwan, he ended up going back to his small town, feeling like his goal had died. He also knows that with Jesus nothing is ever dead, done, final, so he kept

## Pressing On

praying, "Jesus, what are you doing here? What's the purpose in this problem? Where's your power?"

Years later, in the 90's, a community college in his town became a university. A few years after that, the laws were changed, and Chinese students could study abroad. Chinese students started coming to this university. The chaplain at the university didn't know what to do with them, so he started calling every church in this small town, asking, "Is there anyone, anyone who speaks even just a little bit of Mandarin? I have all these students interested in Jesus, and I don't know what to do." 17 years after his goal seemed dead, this man started running a program called Alpha, which introduces people to Jesus and he runs it in Mandarin for these Chinese students.

See, he didn't go to China. God brought China to him. Now eventually, he actually did get to go to China, but for this season, God brought China to him. There was a promise, an initial call placed on his life. There was a problem, but there was purpose in the problem, to refine his goals and show him that with Jesus, there's always a resurrection. It's just not always what we expect, or ask. Along the way, he kept praying, submitted his goal to Jesus, and it was refined and shaped. He vectored through no fault of his own, vectored, but Jesus returned him true north. He kept progressing, and he discovered Jesus' unexpected resurrection power.

What are your goals and are they Jesus' goals? Which of those questions do you need to ask yourself, to help you persevere, trusting that Jesus is at work, whether you see it or not? Jesus is at work because my Bible says that through Jesus we are more than conquerors, and with him, we can persevere through anything. He uses everything for our ultimate good. When we are discouraged, we can say, "I will not give in. I will not give up. I will not give out, or back down. Forgetting what lies ahead, I take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me, and what Jesus takes hold of, he never lets go of. So I stand on the promise that I am a conqueror and co-heir with Christ, trusting every problem has a purpose and my God is the God who provides. Jesus is my victory, and he is here. So I press on to win the prize of my high calling in Jesus Christ my Lord."

Jesus, you are our Lord. You are the king of our hearts. Thank you that even in years of discouragement you are still at work. God, some people here are discouraged after years. Lord, show them that you are at work in their lives. Help them progress. Help them move forward. Help them persevere. Lord, for those of us who feel like we're just moving forward, thank you and help us to always remember it's your power that does it. Lord, help us to see you at work in all of the things of our life, in every goal we have and follow you. We ask this in your name Jesus, Amen.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Read all of Philippians 3. In your own words, what is Paul's main point? How do verses 10-14 fit into that point?
2. From these verses what is Paul saying about where he is in his spiritual journey?
3. What does the image of a runner in a race tell you about our life of faith? About striving toward our goals?
4. What is the "prize" Paul is pressing on toward?
5. If you had to compare your life in Jesus to a race, where would you be right now? On the bench? Warming up? At the starting blocks? Giving it your all? Other? Explain.
6. What goals do you have right now in your life and how does this chapter speak to you about attaining them?