



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Fifth Sunday in Lent (C) – Philippians 3:4b-14

Focus: *Press on towards Christ*

word of life

“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14 NRSV)

Read Philippians 3:4b-14

On this Fifth Sunday in Lent, it is helpful to hear encouraging words from Apostle Paul. He readily shares his own story, including his credentials. Paul writes of himself, “circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.” (Philippians 3:5-6 NRSV) Paul’s view of himself changes once he encounters Christ on the road to Damascus.

1. *Why is it helpful to know Paul’s background?*
2. *What about Paul’s description of himself would you like more information?*
3. *What would you like to ask Paul?*

Some criticize Paul for boasting, but in reality he tosses his credentials away and considers them of little value—as compared to the value of knowing Christ. When Paul was younger, he truly believed he had achieved righteousness before God. But Paul had not yet encountered grace extended to him through Christ.

Paul writes, “More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.” (Philippians 3:8-9 NRSV)

4. *What does Paul mean when he speaks about righteousness coming through faith in Christ?*
5. *What are the implications of this passage for us today?*

Paul’s response to God’s grace is not passive. Instead, Paul sets a goal to pursue Christ in all that he does. He cannot fully reach that goal on this earth, but he strives towards that prize. “Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this 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 heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14 NRSV)

As much as Paul has accomplished in his life, he has not reached the goal. Like an athlete who has learned skills and matured in ability, Paul recognizes his background gives him a unique perspective and theological framework to ask important questions about faith. Christians through the centuries have benefited from Paul’s drive to make Christ his own. His passion has opened up images, metaphors, and bridges to Christians of all ages. Paul fervently desires Christians to have a vibrant faith.

6. *What does it mean to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus?”*

Word among us

The new coach walked in the gymnasium to where his team was waiting for him. This was the first time for the coach and players to size each other up. The coach didn't say a word. He just walked up and down in front of the players. Finally he spoke, "If you are not in the best shape of your life today, then you may regret joining this team. For I plan to run you and work you until we are the most fit team in the country. Don't laugh—in the country! Our goal is a championship—nothing less. So, start running and I will tell you when to stop...Run!"

1. *Have you ever been on a team with a coach who pressed you to be your best? If so, what was that like?*
2. *How do coaches motivate their players to reach their goals?*

Lent is a season of the church year for Christians to take an inventory of one's interior life and set goals. That might mean looking hard and deep inside to discern if we are consistently practicing faith in daily life. Are we open to God's grace? What is our faith-filled response to Christ? By the Fifth Sunday in Lent, it might be tempting to get lax about our Christian disciplines such as prayer, Bible Study, and service. It's not too late to adopt Christian disciplines as part of our daily habits for life beyond the season of Lent.

Although Paul writes his words from prison, he presses on toward Christ. Paul writes, "I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." (Philippians 3:12 NRSV) Paul is not giving up, but strives like an athlete in a race. Paul is not competing against others, but has set a goal for himself.

3. *What is your personal goal as a Christian?*
4. *How did you come to realize that goal for your life?*
5. *What are ways others can be helpful as you pursue your goal?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

Paul shares his personal story as a witness to the transforming power of Christ. As much as Paul was proud of his training in the law and his zeal for the law, he discovers something more. Paul uses his personal story to be a testimony of the power of God to change lives, not once-and-for-all, but as an ongoing process. Paul recognizes his own learning curve in the faith and encourages every Christian to press on to make Christ his or her own.

6. *Take time for someone to share a personal story of faith.*
7. *How might hearing someone's testimony motivate you to press on to make Christ your own?*
8. *What are ways we proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed?*

Prayer

Holy One, give us strength to press on toward the goal of our heavenly call in Christ Jesus. Let us not rely on our past, but help us to reach the finish line.

last word

Seek an opportunity this week
to share with someone how Christ has changed your life.

Daily Faith Practices

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