**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 10-8-2023
Do You Know Him**

Twelve years ago, back in the fall of 2011, the Lord really put on my heart to go back to school, to enter seminary. I remember those days pretty vividly. I had thought about it off and on for about 6 years before then. In fact, a former pastor of mine actually took me to his seminary, to check it out several years earlier.

But it didn’t feel right. I didn’t have peace about it. And I think that this was God’s grace actually, because that particular school has unfortunately strayed pretty far away from its biblical roots.

It wasn’t until 2011 that the Lord was really making it clear that returning to school was something He was clearly calling me to do. And the Lord, in His mercy, led me to a very solid and biblically strong school, for which I am eternally grateful.

But while I was excited to begin this new journey, I would be lying if I said I was not a bit anxious as well. How would things go? I’d been out of school for a while – would I be able to navigate these classes? These kinds of thoughts.

I understood that this journey would not be easy. It would be a lot of work and it would take me out of my comfort zone. And I had two children and Kayla on the way.

But the Lord reassured me that He would take care of me and take care of my family.

But it was clear that for me to know Jesus and follow Jesus in the path that He had for me, I needed to be willing to step out of my comfort zone and just keep my eyes on Him. I reminded myself often that I just wanted to have an auditing mindset in each of my classes.

I didn’t want my classes to be about meeting requirements or getting certain grades. Instead, I really wanted to see each course as an opportunity to know Jesus better, just like an auditor would take a class not for credit, but just to grow as a Christian.

How about you? Can you think of times that God has called you out of your comfort zone in order to better know Him? Maybe it was coming to church? Perhaps it was agreeing to serve or volunteer in some way. Perhaps it was to participate in a Bible Study or small group. All those experiences can make us feel like beginners.

But we can’t let those feelings hold us back from following Jesus in the ways that He calls us to follow Him. For getting to know Jesus better in the ways that He invites us to strengthen our relationship with Him.

If you, like me, desire to grow in knowing Christ better, then be assured that we are in good company. In fact, Paul the apostle, one of the great Christian leaders, can identify with us.

I would invite you to turn with me to the book of Philippians. Over the last several weeks we have been steadily moving through this great letter that God had Paul write to one of the early church communities. And as we read this sacred mail that God inspired to Christians on the other side of the world, we can trust that this is God’s Word not only to them, but also to us. And this should cause us to rejoice!

# Philippians 3:10-17 New International Version (NIV)

**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,** **11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.**

**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.** **13 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,** **14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

**15 All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.** **16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.**

**17Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.**

At this point in Paul’s life, he had been through quite a lot. He had been a Christian for likely over two decades at this point. He had planted churches, he had been imprisoned for his faith at least twice, he had been beaten, stoned, chased out of towns and far more.

And Paul suffered so greatly as a result of his wholehearted dedication to make Christ known far and wide.

Truly, if anyone could come to a place of saying ‘I have no more room to grow as a Christian,’ Paul would certainly be one of those candidates.

And yet, in the words that we are highlighting from his letter this morning, we find some perhaps surprising words.

Paul says, “I want to know Christ.” We can be like, ‘excuse me Paul, what are you talking about? You know Christ! You know Christ about as good as anyone. How can you say, “I want to know Christ”?’

But for Paul to say “I want to know Christ” does not mean that he didn’t know Him before. Instead, Paul’s statement is focused on knowing Christ better and more fully. For him, to know Christ meant a have a living and continuously growing relationship with Jesus.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus states, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

The Scripture is all about developing a living relationship with God. Eternal life is about knowing this amazing God of love and grace and mercy.

Paul knew Christ, but Paul wanted to know Him better every day.

I think about marriage for example. Kara and I have been married for 17 years. It is kind of hard to believe. And we have been through quite a bit together. From the birth of our daughters, to my going back to school (as I shared earlier), to moving a couple of times, and to navigating several other significant events.

As much as we loved each other when we were first married, we should know each other better now than we did then. Relationships are rarely, if ever, stagnant. They’re typically either becoming stronger or weakening.

We can think about friendships. Friendships should deepen and we should know each other better now than when we first became friends.

Paul says, 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,** **11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead**.

In other words, as much as Paul knew Christ, he wanted to know Christ better. And he knew that staying faithful to Christ, even in the midst of his present and likely future sufferings, would lead to him knowing Christ better.

Paul then makes it clear that he has room for growth. He tells the Church in Philippi,

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.** **13 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,** **14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

Paul says that he is pressing on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him. In other words, Paul does not think that he arrived. Paul realized that Jesus is still molding and shaping him and he wants to actively partner with the Lord to become more Christlike.

Paul did not want to just get by and coast to make it to heaven. He wasn’t thinking about retirement and only his past walk with Jesus. No. Paul wanted to be radically devoted to Jesus in his love, in his witness, in a similar way that an athlete or musician should work hard to win a prize. He wanted to know Jesus better every day.

And I firmly believe that this was what the church in Philippi was being called to as well. Radically devotion to Jesus. This is why Paul is writing to them. Paul was calling them to have that same hunger to know Jesus better every day as well.

Finally, Paul shares his big key in getting to know Jesus better. He states this: **“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,** **14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”**

Paul had done so much, but he wasn’t going to get so focused on his past growth and past accomplishments that he fails to continue going forward.

Likewise, Paul is telling the Philippians to press onward in their growth as well. Certainly, they had grown a lot in the years since they had first come to believe in Jesus. But their focus should not be on celebrating their past growth, but instead on pushing forward to continue to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Think of athletes, even though a team wins the championship one season, each player still needs to keep practicing and seeking to improve if the team hopes to succeed again.

Paul concludes this section of his letter by saying, 15 **All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things.** **And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.** **16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.** **17Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.**

Paul is basically saying that every mature believer in Jesus Christ should take such a view.

The word disciple means learner or student. The Philippians were called to follow Paul’s example and seek to be life-long learners and students of Jesus.

As we consider this passage and its importance for us today, what is the main thing to remember? And I believe that it is this. Like Paul, we are called to be pressing forward in our walk with Christ. Like Paul, while we are to be ever-grateful for what God has done, we need to be seeking to keep growing to be more like Jesus.

If Paul was wanting to keep growing, then we must all be eager to grow as well.

Like Paul, one of my prayers is that I keep growing as well. I hope and pray that with each year and ever month by month and week by week --- I am growing.

This, of course, does not mean that we should not be eternally grateful for all that God has done in our lives, but our focus is on growing and knowing Him better.

And the Lord may be calling us to grow in knowing Jesus better in a variety of ways. But we are never to spiritually retire. Instead, we are all called to keep growing and maturing in our walk with Jesus.

I think about of our vision here as Chestnut Grove Church, *to be a light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus Christ*.

The more that we are intentional in continuing to grow and know Jesus better, the brighter the light and love of Jesus will shine through us.

So, what is God calling us to do to keep growing? Whatever that is, let us take the bull by the horns and go forward in the strength of the Lord. Finally, let us remember the joy of our Heavenly Father and of Jesus and the Holy Spirit for that matter, when the Lord sees His children eager to know Him better and better.

Please do not let fear hold you back from growth. Be willing to follow Christ as He leads us. And remember, there are many opportunities to grow – Sunday School, Bible Studies, small groups.

And finally, if you are feeling far from God today, and are not sure if you really do know Him as your Savior and Master, and that your sins have been paid for and forgiven through trusting in Jesus, please know that Jesus is with you today and He receives you as His own if you put your trust in Him and commit to live for Him from now on.

Let us pray…

Resources: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

sources – the boom chair of Susquehanna Conference in 2018 – (Rev. Susanne Elliot) – sermon – Staying in Love – clergy session 5-31-18