

新年劝勉：每日常新的生命追求——腓立比书 3:12-14

New Year Exhortation: The Ever-New Pursuit of the Christian Life – Philippians 3:12-14

Introduction & Outline

- Scripture reading: Philippians 3:1-21

12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

- The Bible strongly contrasts the **old** and the **new**. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new** creature; the **old** things passed away; behold, **new** things have come." (2 Corinthians 5:17) ".....You laid aside the **old** self with its evil practices, and have put on the **new** self who is being **renewed** to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." (Colossians 3:9-10) Ultimately, God will make **all things new** in the **new** heaven and **new** earth.
- Old things are not worth clinging to. Let go of what needs to be let go; forget what needs to be forgotten. God's grace is new every day. Don't let the past hinder you; don't hold on to the past. Live each day with a fresh new perspective. In order to pursue the Lord today in every day, Christians must have the essential perspective of forgetting what is behind and striving toward what is ahead.
- Outline:

Title: New Year Exhortation: The Ever-New Pursuit of the Christian Life

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Background

- The loving relationship between Paul and the Philippian church is very strong, for this is a church diligently striving for the advancement of the gospel (1:5).
- This letter contains no severe rebuke or correction, as the church overall is in a very healthy state of life in Christ.
- There are many exhortations in the letter regarding the Christian life, the key one being to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:27).
- Chapter 3 primarily sees Paul using his own life as an example to motivate the church to strive together with him in pursuing the Lord.

- Pay attention to expressions that convey the idea that he won't get it unless he pursues diligently. "to gain Christ" (v.8), "to be found in him" (v.9), "to know Christ" (v.10), "that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (v.11)...

【Emphasis】 This is not meant to challenge the assurance of salvation for true believers but to express the firm resolution to pursue sanctification diligently and not to take it for granted that I have eternal life. Remind yourself: When you slack from this diligent pursuit, you won't enjoy the assurance of salvation, and you won't really know whether you have eternal life!

Motivation #1: Unsatisfied with the Present (v.12a)

- "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect": Obtained what? Christ (verse 8). The intention in the preceding text is not to boast about the height of my spirituality; on the contrary, the reason I pursue the Lord this way is precisely because I recognize that I am far from having arrived. Yet, I do not find satisfaction in the pursuit itself, but rather, I pursue because I see I am far lacking.

【Application】 When your acts of service are seen by others and praised, you must be clear in your mind: I'm not trying to showcase my spirituality by serving. Instead, my service shows my genuine recognition of how much I lack and need to grow. Conversely, if there's no sign of fervent service, if day after day no one sees you earnestly pursuing the Lord, perhaps you need to ask whether you really see yourself as lacking and needing to grow. Are you so content with the *status quo* as if you've already obtained Christ and are already perfect?

- "But I press on": If I truly know that I am not yet perfect in the Lord, then the life I exhibit should be one of pressing on for perfection. "Press on" is often translated as "persecute," meaning to pursue the Lord with such intensity as chasing down an enemy, persisting until the goal is reached. Unyielding, giving it all, not stopping until the purpose is achieved.

【Application】 Church life is a great way God intends for us to pursue mutual growth. When we see godly qualities in our brothers and sisters, it often makes us see our own deficiencies and motivates us to imitate their example and strive for growth.

Motivation #2: Longing for Perfection (v.12b)

- "So that I may lay hold of ...": Similar to verse 11, the tone does not suggest a doubt whether I will eventually get it, but expresses the attitude that I must pursue diligently or else I really won't get it.

【Insight】 Some people fear the doctrine of assurance of salvation might make Christians lazy and not pursue the Lord. Let Paul answer your concerns. Paul knew doctrine better than

anyone else, and yet when he expresses his attitude of pursuit, there is not the tiniest hint of laziness due to assurance, but rather, he strives even more to fully attain Christ, to become like Jesus completely. This passionate zeal leads him to strive with all his might no matter what.

- "that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus": Christ has already laid hold of me through the gospel and the Holy Spirit; and the reason he did so is exactly in order that I may lay hold of him. Therefore, I must lay hold of him. Attaining Christ is the very goal for which Him laid hold of me.

2 Thessalonians 2:14: "It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may **gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

Romans 8:29: "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined **to become conformed to the image of His Son.....**"

Practical Tip #1: Single-Mindedness (v.13a)

- "Brethren": Transitioning from his own heart expression to an exhortation to the brethren. In verse 15, he urges all who are "mature" (literally "complete", that is, complete in Christ, meaning all Christians) to "have this mindset."
- "But one thing I do": Nothing else matters. The one single focus of my life is to pursue the Lord diligently.

【Insight】 One common hindrance to Christian sanctification is mixed desires. The heart is not focused. You want sanctification, but you also want the praise of others; you want sanctification, but you also want to enjoy life; you want sanctification, but you also want all kind of goodies... Let Paul teach you to do subtraction: Eliminate all other desires, save only one: I want sanctification!

Practical Tip #2: Let the Past Be Past (v.13b)

- "Forgetting what lies behind": Only then can you reach forward to what lies ahead. If you keep staring at the rear mirror while driving, you're likely to hit something.

【Discussion #1】 What "forgetting what lies behind" is not?

1. **It is not mechanically erasing memories.** Past experiences can be valuable lessons, and we don't need to forget those lessons.
2. **It is not being irresponsible for past actions.** Address what must be addressed; correct what must be corrected; full repentance may sometimes require a significant amount of effort dealing with the consequences of sin. Forgetting what lies behind is not an excuse to evade consequences or shun responsibility to repent.

【Discussion #2】 What "forgetting what lies behind" is? What are some of the past things that must be forgotten?

1. **Past successes. Negative example:** The Israelites who returned from Babylon stumbled on their past glories (Ezra 3:12). **Positive example:** Paul rarely mentions his experience of being caught up to the third heaven by the Lord (2 Corinthians 12:1-6).
2. **Past failures. Negative example:** Judas, after betraying Jesus, tortured by guilt, threw the money, and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5). **Positive example:** David fasted for seven days for his illegitimate son, but after the child died, he rose, washed, and ate (2 Samuel 12:21-23).
3. **Past ways of doing things, that is, traditions. Negative example:** Peter refused to eat the food God provided due to the Mosaic regulation (Acts 10:9-15). **Positive example:** God instructed the exiled Israelites to settle down and seek the welfare of the foreign land where they were taken captive (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

Practical Tip #3: Looking at the Goal (v.14)

- "Reaching forward to what lies ahead": The focus must be on what lies ahead.
- "Press on toward the goal": The goal is the glorious image of the Lord Jesus.

【Discussion】 The process of knowing the image of Jesus.

When you first believed, the image of Jesus is quite blurry. There is only a dim light that tells you the image of Jesus is in the Bible. Though blurry, you know the direction, so you run straight toward that direction. As you run closer and closer to Him, His image becomes clearer and clearer. But no matter how far you've run, the direction never changes. We all know the goal we are pursuing is in the direction pointed out to us in the Bible.

【Key Point】 The issue isn't where the goal is; the issue is whether you're running toward it. Are you putting in every effort to read the Bible and live in obedience to it? That's what it means to "press on toward the goal."

- "for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus": From above God calls us upward to receive the prize. It's a continuous upward call. God calls us from above so we may go above continually to be with Him. So, the pursuit of the Christian life is an ever-new pursuit.

Conclusion & Application

Is this your daily pursuit? In the new year, how should you change your life so you may strive upward more earnestly together with your brothers and sisters?