

Hunger

Aiming Higher . . . Pressing Onward, Part 3

Philippians 3:10-11

Dwight Pentecost, author and professor for many years, asked the question, “What makes some Christians spiritual giants and what makes others remain the same?” He responds, “Many would believe that it is the result of a spiritual inheritance or personality – they were just born more spiritually minded than others. Yet the scriptures tell us clearly that there is nothing in our nature or personality that makes someone apt to be more spiritual than another. Still others suggest that it has to do with the circumstances of one’s salvation – some have sensational conversion experiences that seem to lift them from the gutter to the heights more quickly. Yet again, the Bible tells us that all are equally sinful and each believer has been equally and miraculously brought from sin to new life; others would suggest that ministry or service for Christ is the ticket, but far too many illustrations in scripture and in the church have shown that serving God can often replace genuine spiritual growth instead of automatically promoting it. Then Pentecost writes, the key principle to growth can be reduced to one word – appetite. Appetite makes the difference between the immature and the mature, the infant and the adult.¹

The Apostle Peter would write it this way – *like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow (I Peter 2:2)*
Hunger.

Whenever Marsha and I can catch a few minutes in the morning out on the deck with a cup of coffee – which is our idea of a great vacation – we recently have been listening to a nest of little birds nearby – a clutch of baby wrens that have been growing in a

birdhouse in our back yard. All is quiet until one of the adult’s shows up with delivery service and then it is pandemonium – mouths wide open, stretching and squealing for a tiny morsel – instinctively knowing, by the design of God, that if it doesn’t open its mouth, it isn’t going to get fed . . . and its hungry.

Likewise, God is not in the business of forcing open closed mouths and pushing food down our throats. He feeds us in response to our appetite.ⁱⁱ

In his personal testimony, the Apostle Paul testifies that he had filled his life and his heart with accolades, accomplishments, religious zeal and devotion.

But upon encountering the living Lord, everything changed, including his appetite.

In his letter to the Philippians, as Paul writes in chapter 3, he comes to the end of a list of all that had earlier satisfied him and then summarizes; with shocking transparency to his world he writes, all that is rubbish to me now.

It is refuse . . . it’s like spoiled food and it belongs in the sewer.

And now, Paul reaches the climactic statement of his personal testimony where he writes in *verse 10* – *let’s pick it up there* – *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, in order that I might attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Now if I can sort of unpack this portion of Paul’s testimony into 4 separate thoughts, I believe what Paul is saying is that he hungers to:

- know Christ more deeply;

- and what that means is, to live for Christ more dynamically;
- suffer for Christ more dependently;
- and ultimately look for Christ more desirously.

1. First, he wants to know Christ more deeply

That I may know Him.

Notice that this is a personal hunger.

He isn't saying, "I want the church in Philippi to know Him; I want my friends to know him" – this isn't someone saying – "I want my husband or my wife or my children – to know Him. Oh, if only my boss knew him – that would be so great."

I!

I want to know him.

But Paul, wait . . . you already do. Everybody who comes to faith comes into a personal knowledge of Christ as Lord and Savior.

Paul isn't talking about his salvation; he's talking about ongoing transformation.

Listen, becoming a Christian isn't the end of your Christian experience, it's the beginning.ⁱⁱⁱ

This has to do with hunger and appetite.

And for Paul, what he tasted so far of Christ has only whetted his appetite for more.^{iv}

Notice, he writes, That I may *know Him*

The word used by Paul is instructive.

In Silva's wonderful new dictionary, he writes at length on the use of this verb *ginosko* (γινωσκω). In Paul's day, the goal of knowledge was seeing – and not just seeing what comes and goes, but seeing the lasting and real – it was personally grasping the reality of the object under consideration.

Throughout the Bible, this idea is observable; the idea of knowing has to do with caring for, having regard for, having personal contact with what is real.^v

Illustrated so well by one of my commentary friends who told of a mother running into a bedroom after hearing her son screaming in pain – his 2-year old sister had gotten a handful of his hair and wouldn't let go. The mother pried open her daughter's fingers and explained to her son that she didn't mean anything by it because she didn't know that it hurts when she pulls your hair."

The mother was barely out of the room down the hallway when she heard her daughter cry out in pain.

She rushed back in the room and asked, "What happened." Her son said, "She knows now."^{vi}

This is knowledge – not learned at a distance, but up close.

By the way, the idea of an impersonal, uncaring, unfeeling God is literally foreign to scripture.

- God is actually portrayed as someone who *knows the one who seeks refuge in Him (Nahum 1:7)*;
- *The Lord knows the way of the righteous (Psalm 1:6)*;
- God told Jeremiah, *before I formed you in the womb I knew you (Jeremiah 1:5)*;
- David will describe even the formation period of an embryo in the womb as deeply personal – *You (God) formed my inward parts; you wove me in my mother's womb . . . how precious are your thoughts to me, O God; how vast is the sum of them (Psalm 139)*;
- Likewise, the believer is commanded to *be still and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10)*.

One day in the final judgment there will stand before Christ many miracle workers and preachers and prophets who are denied entrance into heaven, even though they did everything in the name of God – and Jesus Christ will say to them, *I never knew you (Matthew 7:23)*.

He certainly knew about them . . . in fact, He knew everything about them; and they knew some things about Him; but they were never personally related to Him by the new birth of faith in Him alone.

In other words, Jesus is saying, "You don't belong to me." I don't know you.

Throughout the Old Testament Greek translation, this is the verb used for sexual intimacy – the Bible simply records *he knew her*.

This is more than the knowledge of intellect . . . this is the knowledge of intimate contact.^{vii}

This explains further, by the way, in the New Testament where we're told that Christ did not *know sin (2 Corinthians 5:21)*. Christ certainly knew about sin – He knew everything about sinners – but He wasn't intimately related to any personal sin of His own – He never knew sin.

He never personally engaged in sin.

So when Paul writes here that he wants to know Christ, what he's saying is that he wants to know Christ more intimately – more personally – not just

facts about Christ so he can get an A on the quiz; he wants to personally care for, and give regard to, and commune with, and walk with, and be led by his Shepherd and Savior.

Paul wants to know Christ more intimately.

2. Secondly, Paul wants to live for Christ more dynamically

Paul writes in *verse 10, That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.*

The word for power is *dunamin* (δυναμιν) from which we get our word dynamite, dynamo, dynamic – which is not far off the mark.

But again, wait a minute Paul – you have already experienced the life changing resurrection power of God.

And so have we; at our conversion to Christ through faith alone, our spirit was dynamited out of the clutches of darkness and brought into the kingdom of life – before salvation, we are considered *dead in sin and trespasses; but God quickened us – literally He made us alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:5); He raises us to live life in the resurrected Christ (Galatians 2:20).*

And that's only the beginning.

Paul is hungry for that same resurrecting dynamic to course through his life.

This is what one author called, living life plugged in. We will never have resurrection power on our own; we can't manufacture it, manipulate it, turn it up or even turn it on.

It isn't generated by us – it is God's power, revealed to us and demonstrated through us – and Paul was hungry to live his life by that power.

Let me illustrate it this way: a couple weeks we got a new garage door – with a brand new door opener. It's so quiet. Our old one sounded like a Sherman tank was attacking.

I had been putting this off for years. And the reason we needed one goes back now almost 15 years ago when we first moved in. We had a garage back at our old house, but we never parked in it. It was used for more important things – like a ping pong table.

So not long after we moved into our new home, I backed out of the garage one morning – before raising the garage door; a minor oversight. Just fast enough to put a dent in that garage door and ever so slightly twist the metal track overhead. For 15 years that door has been a problem . . . entirely

unsanctified. It finally began to buckle at the top and we got the new door.

It worked for a day and then stopped. I called the garage door company and they gladly sent out a repairman at no cost. Everything about that statement is true except the word gladly.

He found out that there was a kink in the wire and the power wasn't flowing. He fixed the kink. It worked for another day and then stopped. I called the garage door company and they gladly – well, they came out. It was the same repairman too. He said to me, "It's strange, the little screens or eyes that send the light beam across the bottom of the garage opening don't have steady power, so as far as your garage door opener is concerned, something's blocking the path – it's like it isn't even plugged in.

So he ended up rewiring the entire system . . . and now all week it has worked like a charm . . . and he'll never have to come back . . . I'm going to miss him.

I couldn't help but think of the analogy.

So often I think:

- something's blocking my path –
- something's standing in the doorway of my progress – something's getting in the way of what my life outta be like –
- when the problem is really one of power. There isn't a steady flow . . . I'm not plugged in.

The problem isn't the manufacture – it isn't the hardware – the problem is some hidden obstruction to the dynamic of God's power flowing in and through my life like it ought to.

There's a kink in the line . . . it might be laziness or disobedience or callousness or selfishness.

Jerry Bridges puts it into convicting terms when he writes, It is time for us Christians to face up to our responsibility for holy living. Too often we say that we are defeated by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated, we are disobedient. It might be better if we stopped using the terms "victory" and "defeat" to describe our progress . . . rather we should use the terms "disobedience" and "obedience."^{viii}

Resurrection power means living in light of the fact that God has given us the power to live out His commands.

Paul often refers to the power of God – this same power within us. He calls it:

- the power of God through the gospel (Romans 1:16);

- the eternal power of God seen through creation (Romans 1:20);
- the message of the cross which is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18);
- the power of the Holy Spirit enabling us as He indwells us (1 Corinthians 2:4-5);
- the resurrection power that raises us to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4).

Paul hungered for more of it – which meant he hungered to obediently demonstrate the power of Christ within him – to face life with the conscious, intimate, awareness that the stone has been rolled away and Jesus Christ is alive in us and through us.

Paul might be chained to a Roman guard and imprisoned awaiting sentencing, but the power of the resurrection has changed everything – and he wants to think and believe and pray and obey and live in the power of his citizenship – not of Rome, but the Kingdom of God.

Sam Gordon of the United Kingdom writes in his commentary of the dream come true – and the humor of one conversation – for a Frenchman who became an Englishman. After a long haul, having so admired the British Empire and the British way of life, he finally became a citizen. When a friend of his asked what significant difference his British citizenship had made to him, he thought a moment and then said, “Well, among other things, I find that now instead of losing the Battle of Waterloo, I have won it.”^{xix}

Living in the power of the resurrection means that you are living in light of the fact that as a citizen of heaven, no matter what the evidence seems to indicate, you are on the winning side – forever.

But before you reach for that crown . . . be prepared and willing to carry a cross.

Paul not only hungers to know Christ deeply; and to live for Christ more dynamically, but;

3. Thirdly, to suffer with Christ more dependently

Paul writes further in *verse 10, That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformed to His death.*

Christlikeness leads to and through Calvary.^x

We don't really know exactly because Paul doesn't specify here;

- he might be referring to his nearly guaranteed martyrdom;

- he might be referring to a life of dying to sin by being united with Christ (Romans 6:6);
- he might be referring to suffering for the sake of the gospel – which every believer does to some degree. (Philippians 1:29)^{xi}

Actually it could be all of the above.

But would you notice that even though Paul has already spoken in this letter of suffering (**1:29**), he adds here that this is fellowship with Christ – *the fellowship of His sufferings*.

Here's that word *koinonia* again – fellowship. But it's not the usual churchy kind of word we think of when we think of a church fellowship . . . which means a church potluck.

This is fellowship but it is a fellowship of suffering – and who would ever want to join that fellowship? Hey, I've heard that church over there has good suffering – let's join it – what are we waiting for?^{xii}

Paul isn't talking about fellowshiping around a casserole – but fellowshiping around a cross.

Tolkien's classic work entitled *The Lord of the Rings* finds several men bound together on the task of destroying the power of the Dark Ruler and they bind themselves together in what is called *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

The Fellowship of the Ring – that doesn't mean they're going to enjoy the great outdoors together, it means they're going to depend on each other – and struggle together as they battle and suffer and struggle together.

Paul hungers for the fellowship of the Redeemer and others who know Him and suffer.

The good news is that suffering for Christ is suffering with Christ. In other words, you are not alone. There are many who haven't bowed the knee to Baal.

You are not alone, but furthermore, you are not *on* your own.

Would you also notice here the order; the power of His resurrection precedes the fellowship of His sufferings.^{xiii}

Which is critical . . . you will not be able to handle the fellowship of suffering unless you are walking in the power of the resurrection.

Suffering is never the end goal for the believer, depending on the resurrection power of Christ and suffering like Christ who *for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2)*.

Being plugged in and dependent upon, allows you to press on.

Paul hungered:

- to know Christ more deeply;
- to live for Christ more dynamically,
- to suffer with Christ more dependently

One more:

4. Fourth, to look for Christ more desirously

Notice verse 11, In order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

And what would that mean? That he would be with Christ forever.

Your translation might read, *That somehow I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Paul isn't expressing uncertainty on his future in heaven he's simply acknowledging that he doesn't know the route by which God will bring him to the finish line.^{xiv}

Somehow . . . I don't know how . . . I don't know the details, or the timing, but eventually, Paul effectively writes, my suffering will take me to a resurrection from among the dead – and I'm looking forward to making it through the final lap.

This means I'll be in the immediate and face to face presence of Jesus Christ – the one I've hungered to love and live for and obey all these years.

This is Paul's abiding hunger.

He had tasted Christ . . . and he wanted more of the same.

Paul never got over that taste . . . and like the Psalmist, he would invite us, all the more, to **taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8).**

What are you hungry for? And how hungry are you?

Have you identified what it is in your life that dampens your hunger for Christ? Have you taken time lately to think about those things you nibble on that end up stunting your appetite for the things of God?

In other words, what robs your affection for Christ? What unplugs you from godly desire and godly living? What stirs your affection for Jesus and the gospel and His word?^{xv}

What are you going to do about it?

In other words, will you surround yourself with those things that stir up hunger pangs for God?

Will you stay away from those things that move you away from the table of His presence and power?

Beloved, your relationship with God will never be dynamic:

- if your relationship with His word is casual;
- if your obedience to Him is partial;
- if your communication with Him is occasional.

Paul is passionately informing us that what he really hungers for is a relationship with Christ that is marked, not by the occasional, or casual or partial; but the perpetual and the habitual and the continual.

Jonathan Edwards of the mid-1700's wrote, "This is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives or children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows; but enjoyment of God is the substance. Family and friends are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. They all are but streams, but God is the fountain; these are but drops, but God is the ocean."^{xvi}

Oh, we tend to focus on and live for and pursue the watery droplets and scattered beams . . . let's remember . . . and long for, and hunger and thirst after the fountain and the ocean and the sun.

The song writer took this paragraph we've now studied and put the main thoughts to music . . . the lyrics read:

*All I once held dear, built my life upon,
All this world reveres, and wars to own,
All I once thought gain I have counted loss
Spent and worthless now, compared to this:
Now my heart's desire is to know you more,
To be found in you and known as yours,
To possess by faith what I could not earn;
All-surpassing gift of righteousness;
Oh, to know the power of your risen life
And to know You in Your sufferings,
To become like you in your death, my Lord,
So with you to live [forever] and never die*

*Knowing You, Jesus,
Knowing You, there is no greater thing
You're my all, You're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
And I love you, Lord.^{xvii}*

Knowing You – there is no greater thing in life.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/14/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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- i J. Dwight Pentecost, The Joy of Living: A Study of Philippians (Lamplighter Books, 1973), p. 134
- ii Ibid
- iii Warren W. Wiersbe, Philippians: Be Joyful (Victor Books, 1978), p. 89
- iv Adapted from Dennis E. Johnson, Philippians (P & R Publishing, 2013), p. 199
- v Moises Silva, New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis (Zondervan, 2014), p. 575
- vi Sam Gordon, Philippians: An Odyssey of Joy (Ambassador, 2004), p. 122
- vii Ibid, p. 123
- viii Charles Colson, Loving God (Zondervan, 1987), p. 137
- ix Gordon, p. 125
- x J.A. Motyer, The Message of Philippians (IVP Academic, 1984), p. 169
- xi Adapted from G. Walter Hansen, Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Philippians (Apollos, 2009), p. 246
- xii Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, Philippians (Crossway Books, 2007), p. 140
- xiii Hughes, p. 141
- xiv Johnson, p. 201
- xv Adapted from Matt Chandler, To Live is Christ (David C. Cook, 2013), p. 101
- xvi Quoted by Stephen Davey in Overcoming the Me Attitudes (Charity House, 2010), p. 47
- xvii Graham Kendrick, "Knowing You" 1994 Make way Music