

Running to know Christ fully

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[0:00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Northean. So we've been looking at Philippians and you can go back and have a check out the many different pictures of how we respond to Jesus' humility.

! And he uses this kind of picture of, it almost seems a bit like an Olympic sprinter, of going for the goal and going for the sort of finishing line and being people who run after him, pursue him. And he's got some really helpful stuff for us on how we do that and what it looks like to do that for you and for me and for the Philippian Church. I don't know if you know who these guys are, they are a running group from Glasgow.

I've suddenly forgotten their name, I should have written it down. But they had a pretty unfortunate event took place earlier this year for them. There were about 130 of them that were on a 10k run, let me check my notes.

On a 10k run and something pretty horrible happened. Some guys dressed up as stewards, got probably their pound shop high-vis jackets on. And went along the course and redirected a whole load of signs.

[1:30] Now in some ways this feels a bit like wacky races, doesn't it? In some ways it's actually quite funny. It probably wasn't funny if you're one of the 10k racers running that 10k. Because you ran 2.5k in the wrong direction before the guys coming here clearly ran out.

Like energy or didn't be bothered anymore to put any more to take signs up. And there were just 31 of the 111 racers standing in the field thinking, where the heck do we go next? And I imagine they did what you and I would do of getting their phones out and then looking at their DPS and going, we are in completely the wrong place.

They might have run really hard. They might have trained really well. In fact I suspect they had if they got that far. They might have run with great joy as they ran with other people.

But they were heading in the wrong direction. And all that effort left them lost. And Paul is keen that we both run for Jesus. That we run using all the resources available to us.

And that we run in the right direction. That we're not left in a spiritual field thinking, where are the signs? Which way do I go from here?

[2:40] I've got something horribly wrong along the way. Or someone has led me in the wrong direction. So let's take a look at Philippians 12 to 14. And we're going to dot around a little bit in that chunk there as well.

So Paul treats the Christian life as a race. And you can see that in his text when he says this. Not that I have already obtained all of this, verse 12. Or I've already arrived at my goal.

But I press on taking hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I don't consider myself to have yet taken hold of it.

But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind, straining towards what is ahead. I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Not that I've already obtained this. Not that I've already obtained my goal. But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus or Jesus Christ took hold of me.

[3:46] So the question has to be, what is his goal? Like what's he looking for? Is he looking for a really hard one life? Is it about effort? Is it about, you know, what's his goal to end up in a Philippian jail?

Probably not. What is he talking about when he says the goal that he wants to pursue? It's just a little bit earlier in Philippians 3.10.

He phrases it really nicely. He says this, I want to know Christ. The goal of the Christian life is to know Jesus.

And he describes it in 3.10 like this. I want to know Christ, the power of his resurrection. Participate in his suffering. Become like him in his death. Now, my temptation is to preach a whole preach on just that verse.

Because it's a beautiful picture of what it means to know Jesus. He's saying, I want to know his strength and power. He's come back from the dead. That power is available to you and me.

[4:45] But he also says something a little bit more scary. I want to participate in his suffering. Ooh, that's a bit more challenging. Or even more challenging.

I want to become like him in his death. Because those things, for Paul, follow from knowing Jesus. We know him, so we get to know his power. We get to understand his suffering and where he is in our suffering.

And we become more and more like him. It's funny, isn't it, though? Because if the goal of the Christian life is to know God, well, I suspect for most of us, that seems a bit like job done.

But we can stop there, right? Because I think for most of us, we probably say, I know him. Like, I got to know God. Like, for me, when I was 17, I got to know Jesus for the first time.

I put my trust in him. And yet, Paul says of himself that he's not finished. That the goal isn't. He's not there yet. And that's because the biblical understanding of knowing is much richer than, kind of, I know it.

[5:49] But it's in my head as a fact. He, when you see in the scripture in the Old Testament, you see that Adam knew Eve. It's actually a word used to describe an intimate relationship.

Or Moses, who knew God. An intimate, kind of, covenantal, lived, personal, heart and soul experience. And when Paul says it, I'm going to look at the Greek words in a second.

And there's a key word that he uses, which is not just head knowledge. It's whole life knowledge. Head, heart, hands, habits, all of that.

Now, I was chatting with Toby about this in my car. And I was asking him if he knows how to play ukulele. And he's quite a sheepish because he currently knows two chords and I know five.

We're not really particularly a musical family. But we definitely enjoy a bit of jamming. I'm absolutely not going to play a few partly because I haven't got the time idea partly. Because it would make me cringe. But when I asked him if he knew how to play ukulele, he kind of said, do I?

[6:54] You know, I'm like, well, that's good. I'm glad you're not sure if you know. Because, I don't know, I don't know, even most eight-year-olds seem to think they do know almost everything. But he said, kind of, Dad. I said, tell me, what does it mean?

What does it mean to know how to play ukulele? Well, I can tell you, for me, it means that I know my five chords. And I know them.

Like, I could probably draw you the chord charts. Maybe not. But I could show you how my fingers should be if I wasn't preaching to you and a little bit nervous. I can also tell you that I know when it sounds awful. So, like, today I picked it up to play a couple of chords just before coming out.

And I went, oh, my kids would be messing with us. All of the tuning was off. And so, knowing wasn't just up here. As Toby said to me, it belongs to my ears as well, Dad. He said, I know when I hear it. I said, is that it? So, is it all about playing ukulele? Is it all about knowing in your... Is it all about knowing in your kind of head and then listening? I was like, no, obviously not, Dad.

[7:52] I need to actually move my fingers in the right way as well. It has to actually become something. It can't just be in my head. It's like, duh, Dad, do you not know this? Knowledge, even when we play something, when we develop a skill, it isn't just here.

It's lived out. It's in our mind. It's in our fingers. It's in our ears in some way, or at least they're used in it. And it has to also be in our habits. Because otherwise, that knowledge, certainly if you're 44 like me, doesn't stay around for long if you're not doing something often and reminding yourself of stuff often.

And the Bible shows this really clearly in a couple of Greek words that are used. So, we've got two key words when it comes to talking about, I want to know Jesus. We can talk about oida. And this is like tick box. Do you know it? Yes or no? Oida is like, do I actually have that knowledge? In my head in some way. Like, is it there? Yes, I know it. Or this other one, which is Genosco. This is the exciting one. And this is the one that Paul uses. When he says the goal of the race of the Christian life is to know Jesus, he's saying it's Genosco. [9:04] He's saying it's not just theory, but it's relationship knowledge. It's not just neat and quiet. It's deep and it's alive. It's not just something that we do once, but it's something that we participate in and we live out.

Genosco. I want to Genosco Jesus. It's more like saying, I want to experience him. I want to live with him alive in me. I want to grow with him. And we've talked a lot, and you'll hear us using this phrase a lot.

I want to apprentice with him. I want to walk alongside him and know him with me wherever I go, whatever I'm doing. So much more exciting than Oida.

I know him. I met with him once. So I meet with him again and again. I live in all different circumstances with him. So if the goal is knowing Jesus, Paul then goes on to give us five different things that will help us in that.

And help us to know him in every situation. Help us to know him as the ultimate goal. Help us to be people who keep our eyes fixed on the prize of truly knowing him.

[10:25] The first one here is, well, how do we run then? And if you run like me, very badly. Like in actual running, I look a little bit like I'm, I don't know, some kind of windmill effect going on.

But Paul is keen that we use a key technique that he knows will help us. Gymnoscope. Aim for deep knowledge that is in every part of our life.

And deep apprentice relationship with him. And he says this. And let's have a look at the next set of verses. Says verse 13.

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining forward to what is ahead.

I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ. It's a little bit funny, isn't it? Because he says, one thing I do. And then he sneaks in two things.

[11:32] He says, one thing I do is I forget. I forget what's behind me. And I strain forward. And you can kind of imagine. That is the act of running, really, isn't it? Unless you're on our bleeding treadmill that Toby won again at the recent chat.

Which I still can't forget. You know, when nothing moves behind you as you run. You just keep running and nothing changes. I can't be bothered with it. Because it annoys me that you don't seem to make any progress. But here he's describing exactly what goes on as you run.

Like the stuff that was in front of you has to end up behind you. Otherwise you're going nowhere. And that's his key technique for us. Is we need to become two things. A people who strain forwards. And who allow ourselves to forget the stuff that is behind us. Because we're going for gold.

We're not just there to see the sights. We're not there for all the stuff that will run past. We're heading towards knowing Jesus in his fullness. I wonder for Paul how sort of weird that is.

[12:38] Because I wouldn't have been shocked. If Paul, who's lived this exciting life. Of, you know, radical conversion. Of not knowing Jesus.

Hearing from the Holy Spirit as he is on a walk one day. Being blinded. Getting radically saved. Away from capturing and harming Christians.

Into sharing the gospel. And now he's stuck. Now he's kind of treadmill like. He's stuck in this situation. Not going anywhere really.

You wouldn't blame him. If in fact rather than expecting to move forward in knowledge of Christ. He just spent his time reminiscing. It would be entirely possible for him to think. I'll just sit here and remember what the Lord used to do in my life.

And yet instead he's saying. I want to know Christ. And he expects to. I haven't attained it yet. Here's where I'm going. Knowledge of Christ. And here's how I'm going to do it.

[13:37] I'm going to keep straining forward. Seeking him. Even in the darkness. Even in house arrest. I'm going to strain for him. I wonder what that means for you.

To strain after him. Not just to sort of be a passenger with him. But to say. Like I'm grabbing hold of you. You know pursue is another adequate translation of this straining word.

It's I just want to get hold of all that he's got for me. But the other essential skill here is forgetting. Do you know I love Barcelona.

I've been there once in my life. And I absolutely love this place. Anyone know what it is? Yeah. Sagrada Familiar. Which I always say. I think I say wrong. I'm a bit nervous about. But I think this is one of the most beautiful odd buildings in the world.

Like I've I walked in and has anyone else been there? A few of us have. Okay. I mean it's one of those places that I went many years ago and probably didn't spend enough time there. It's the most beautiful cathedral that never seems to be finished.

[14:38] With all this amazing architecture. And it's absolutely stunning. And there's this interesting thing if you're running the Barcelona Marathon that you have to do. Is you have to run straight past it.

Like because your goal is somewhere else. And yet there's this wonderful thing that I quite frankly could spend probably a couple of days just being like wow inside of. And yet to run the race involves forgetting not just the bad stuff.

Not just the bad stuff you've done or other people have done to you. By actually purposefully sometimes forgetting the good stuff. Because it's not the race you've been called to.

That is the exact picture of that. Keep running. But you can't get to the end of this marathon without running past some pretty good stuff.

You get to enjoy them on the way past. But in a moment as you run this race. That thing that you might think is wonderful. Is very quickly in the rear view mirror. And that's how it's designed to be.

[15:42] Because to run towards Jesus is to leave behind. And to know him fully. Is to leave behind the hurts of the past that have happened to you.

But is also to leave behind the junk that you've done. And the sin that's been forgiven by Jesus. But is often also to run past some things that are really, really tempting.

Maybe a relationship that you know isn't the best. But you're clinging to. Maybe a hope that the Lord would take you somewhere else.

To a different place. And yet you know that to know him he's put you where he wants you. The key thing is whether you're with him in it. But I think these verses are encouraging us.

I'm sure they are. Encouraging us to be a forgetful people on purpose. Because forgetting is essential if we're going to move forward. Many a thing will go from in front of us to behind us.

[16:41] It's a sign that we're growing. A sign that we're moving forward. So we need to be a forgetful people. Of shame, of pride, of comfort. Of opportunities that aren't his for us.

And strain towards what he's called us to. Him as our greatest goal. I wonder for you what one thing you need to forget.

Is it something that's a distraction? Maybe something you feel you're owed. Maybe an attitude towards someone else. Maybe a really seemingly good thing.

That you know. Is stopping you from moving further and further into knowing Jesus. It'll be different for each of us. But I'd encourage you.

Be specific. Ask him if you don't know. Ask him to reveal it to you. But probably there's something you do. You know you need to put down. Or let it pass you by. The next thing Paul's keen that we know is.

[17:44] Who we should run with. And not just these skills of forgetting and straining. But also that he's given us people to run with. And in verse 17 he says this.

He says, Join 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. For as often as I've told you. I'll go into that in a second.

Even with tears. Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. We need running partners. We can't do it alone. We're not designed to. We're designed to be a people.

Who have a saviour. Who arrived as flesh and blood. And we're designed to be a people. Who have running partners. Who are flesh and blood running partners. Every so often I try. The.

Those coaching videos. On. On the gym stuff. The treadmill. We'll have someone. Who'll talk you through it all. And the trouble is. They've already done that thing.

[18:38] That they're telling me to correct. And move on to the next thing. Because they're not a real person. They're just a video that I'm watching. I can't quite keep up with. And yet there's a reason. That we're told here. Find some people. Just as athletes.

Seek out the best coaches. We need people. Who are following Jesus. To keep pointing us to him. Instagram. TikTok. Podcasts. And books. Can all help us. But they're not.

Flesh and blood people. He's given us. To run. Alongside. I am. Regularly humbled. By. By our church family.

By you guys. Regularly. Humbled. Sometimes I know we can feel. Not that mature. Or not that big. Or not that this. Or not that whatever. But I am so humbled.

As I watch you guys. Dive into scripture. And seek him first. I'm so humbled. As I watch some of you. Persevering. Through real difficulty.

[19:33] And seeking him. Against huge opposition. Humbled as I. As I. See you. Your attitude to worshipping him. Or your attitude to generosity. And time.

And talents. And money as well. It's. I love. That he puts us in church family. And it's quite easy to miss.

Quite how much he's doing. With the people. Near you. Unless we're spending. Time together. And that's why I so value. Our home groups. And time.

Just for a walk. And a pray. And a chat. Or a meal. And I just want to encourage you. Paul here saying. You need some running partners. You've got loads here. But.

If you've. If you've run with others. Before. You need to set a date. And a time. To go for a run. You need to. Set a point. Where you're going to turn up to. Otherwise. It's just theoretical.

[20:27] I would just encourage you. The application for this bit is. Who will you run with? Run with people. Who are imitating Jesus. And be. Slow enough. Around one another. To see when that's happening.

Because it really is. There's so much richness. Amongst us here. Find yourself some running partners. What is it with microphones today?

Find yourself running partners. And. And we've got a wealth of them. Right here. But it takes arrangement. It takes vulnerability. I just want to encourage you. It's thoroughly biblical. And keep going with it.

If you're already doing it. If you're not in deep relationships. From other people. From our church family. Work out how to do that. Or come and chat with. With one of us in leadership. And we'd love to help you with that.

Because it's. It's so vital for us. Because the risk is. What's happening. Around Paul. When he writes this. The next question is. What's the risk? I think.

[21:24] And. And. And here's the thing. He says this. In verses 18 and 19. I've often told you before. And with many tears. There are people who live as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Destined for destruction. They make God of their. I make God of their stomach. Their glory is their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. It's entirely possible.

For us to run after. Things that will come to nothing. No. He says of these people. They're heading for destruction. I'm not totally convinced.

Our experience is. Awful people. Trying to drag us off. Away from Jesus. I suspect. For us. In. The world we live in now. It's a bit subtler than that. It's just.

People with different goals to us. Who think achievement looks different. To knowing Jesus. And will just. Take us off course. A little tiny bit. But enough to eventually end up in that field.

[22:22] We talked about earlier. Having not managed to stay on track. Paul has a stern warning here. Because he knows. That the human heart

searches after many things.

And if you want to study that. We're running out. We've run out of time. But if you want to study that. Ecclesiastes 2. Is a case study. In all the stuff. That we might seek after. Wisdom. Work. Wealth. Pleasure. Achievement. Meaning. Outside of Christ. Christ. And the heart loves. To go off course. And there are many people who will help us. So we need.

To know the goal. We need some running partners. We need to strain. And forget. But do know. The risk there. Is there are other goals. I fear.

I would hate it. At the end of my life. To meet with Jesus. And for him to say. I love you Gordon. I saved you. You're mine. You didn't have to earn it.

[23:18] Any more than putting your trust in me. But what the heck. Did you do. With all those years. Why weren't you. Why weren't you seeking me. Gosh.

How awful that would be. It's totally possible. And I'm still. We'll still be in. Because fortunately. This race. Isn't one. Of us saving ourselves.

It says here in scripture. I press on. To take hold of that. For which Christ Jesus. Has taken hold of me. So he's already got you. If you've trusted him. You're already his.

But this race. Is one that he's called you to. Because he wants you to know him. More and more. And more. We're going to wrap up. In just a second. But the final thing.

Given to us. To help us. In this kind of running section. From Paul. Is this. This. This. This thing here. Notice. This is my old passport.

[24:14] Because I had the shock. Ten minutes before coming to church. And this guy. My passport. Is not in our safe. And we're going to go home. And frantically search. So you can see my. My old. Old one here. But. We are told.

In verse 20. Our citizenship. Is in heaven. And it's quite an odd jump. He's talking about race. You know. Go for the goal. Keep going. Aim for Jesus. Grow in knowing him.

As the ultimate goal. And he says. These guys might lead you astray. But. As he says. In verse 20. They're focused on earthly things. You and my.

Our citizenship. Is in heaven. And we're waiting for Jesus. To come from there. Who's going to bring everything. Under. His control. We're not running.

To know Jesus. As people who. Who are. You know. He's only. Belong to him. If we really know him. Really well. It's just not what we see in scripture. We see.

[25:11] Put your trust in him. Start following him. You're his. And you get your. Passport. As a citizen. Of heaven. So now. When you run this race.

In fact. What you're doing. Is you're more like an Olympian. Representing. Your country. You're called to get to know him. As a sign to the world around you. Of who he is.

And how great he is. Because the end result. The end result. Of all time. Will be this. It will be that Jesus. Will be home.

Says here in verse 21. He's going to bring everything under his control. It's all going to be his. At the moment it's a mess. One day. He will reign as the king. Visibly in front of us.

And everyone will know. That he is the king. But for now. You and I. One of the ways we can keep running. Is remembering our citizenship.

[26:10] When we face a frustration. Or a hurt. Or a challenge. We're a citizen. We're not striving to achieve something.

In our own strength. We belong to him. We're doing it for him. And in fact. As it says. I hope it says it on this one still. Yes it does. As it says in here. Your passport from heaven.

Will say something very similar. It says here. Her Britannic majesty. Secretary of state. Requests and requires. In the name of her majesty. All those it may concern. Allow the bearer to pass freely. And afford the bearer. Such assistance and protection. As may be necessary. You are a citizen of heaven. And in this race of knowing Jesus. When you fall down.

You are able to say. I need help. I belong to the king. I'm running for him. And you have the resources of heaven. That can get involved in your life.

[27:06] And will get involved. And will help you. Thank you. Run for Jesus. Run towards the goal.

Of knowing him fully. In all areas of your life. And work out those things. That you need to forget.
And allow to pass you by. And strain after knowing him.
As our ultimate goal. Run as a citizen of heaven. Who has heaven cheering you on. But also is able
to say. I need you Lord.
And a citizen in a foreign land. Showing people. That you belong somewhere else. That you're
running the race. To represent him. That your life.
Doesn't follow. The ways of other people's. Because you. Are seeking Jesus. As your ultimate goal.
And to fully. Genesco him. To fully know him. In hands.
[28:02] In heart. In habits. In head. In all things. Because that's what
he's calling you to. And that's what's available to you. Let me pray for
us. And then we'll wrap up. Because I can hear our kids.
Are desperate for us to finish. Let's pray. Jesus.
We want to know you. We want to. Genesco you. We don't want to just tick a box. And saying. I
know Jesus.
We want to. Ask you. To rule in every area of our lives. Every single bit. And grow us as a people.
Who know you deeply. Who know your power.
Who know you in suffering. Who know your. Glorious future. That you have. Ahead. That you invite
us into. And ask that this week.
[28:57] You'd help us. Train well. Help us forget. What we need to
forget. Help us strain. After you. As citizens of heaven. We love you
Lord.
Work. Through your spirit. In us and around us. As we look to you. In Jesus name. Amen. Guys. I'm
sorry you've run over.
I would encourage you. To grab a. Child. If you've got one. And a coffee. If you need one. And let's
spend some time together. Enjoying fellowship. And have a. Have a great week.