

“You Got to Hold On”

July 4, 2021

**Phillipians Week 9
Phi 3:12-4:1**

Have you guys ever heard of the band Alabama Shakes? I am not certain what all they stand for but they sound great. Anyway, the first single I heard from them was “Hold on”. Not gonna sing it but it opens with the following lyrics:

*Bless my heart, bless my soul
Didn't think I'd make it to 22 years old
There must be someone up above
Sayin', "Come on, Brittany, you got to come on up*

*You got to hooooooooold on
Hey, you got to hooooooooold on*

There is something that resonates within when you hear someone belting out, “You got to hold on. Hey, you got to hold on.”

This is kind of the theme for what Paul is writing in our text today. You got to “hooold on.” Following after Jesus can be hard, it can be pretty difficult at times. In 1 Timothy, Paul describes, following Jesus as toiling and striving, training and disciplining yourself for godliness. As in it takes work. Not working to gain favor but a pursuit to know him and follow hard after him. Earlier in Phillipians Pauls says we are to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus who emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. The way of Jesus is to know him, to become like him, to follow in his way. And no one stumbles into this kind of godliness, but it is a disciplined pursuit, often full of sacrifice and suffering.

So as we start this morning, where are you in following Jesus?

- Are you moving in the right direction?
- Are you experiencing victory in the Lord?
- Are you seeing and rejoicing in the movement of God in and around your life?

If that's you, praise God. Keep at it. Keep holding on.

For others of you, you might be in a very different place.

- Are you tired? Are you worn down?
- Are you discouraged? Have you considered giving up?
- Have you gotten off track or out of sync?

I am not sure where you are today, but either way family, we “got to hooooooooold on.”

So here is what we are going to do today as we walk through this passage, we are going to be asking 4 questions that help us examine ourselves and in answering these questions it will also help us in our pursuit to “hold on” or as Paul is going to say, help us to “press on” in the way of Jesus.

Pray

Picking up In verse 12, Paul says,

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already **perfect (complete, reach the end of a journey)**, but I **press on (to run after, seek eagerly)** to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

As we mentioned last week, Paul believes, he is convinced and convicted that knowing Jesus is better than anything else. He willingly forsakes his former life. He willingly suffers. As the parable says he sold everything to purchase the pearl of great price. Some might say he is “All In.” He treasures Jesus above all.

This is his desire, but he is not there yet. He has not completed the journey, he has not arrived. Spurgeon when preaching says.

“He has not won the race yet; his joy arises from the fact that he is in the right course and that he is running in the right direction

Let’s look at verse 12 from a different translation. This is the NASB. “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.

The word **Obtained (Katalambano)** is used 3 times in this verse.

- To catch - like trapping in hunting
- To apprehend - like a criminal
- To seize or lay hold of.

- I have not caught it, but I am pressing on to catch it because Jesus has caught me.

- I have not apprehended it but I am pressing on to apprehend it because Jesus has apprehended me.

- I have not seized it, but I am pressing on to seize it because Jesus has seized me.

- I have not laid hold of it, but I am pressing on to lay hold of it because Jesus has laid hold of me.

“Jesus has caught, apprehended, seized, laid hold of me.” This the key. We are saved by Jesus, rescued from the power of sin, removed from the kingdom of darkness and set into the kingdom of light. As we continue in life we are sanctified, conformed into his image. Becoming more and more like Jesus. When we reach heaven we are glorified. The transformation is complete. Until then, we have not reached the end, we are in constant pursuit. We press on.

This is our why. We are not there yet, but we press on. We have not obtained it. But we press on because Jesus pressed on to obtain us. This is our gospel motivation. This is what drives us to keep on. We have not obtained it, but we press on to obtain it because he obtained us.

¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: **forgetting** what lies **behind** and **straining forward** to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I **press on** toward **the goal for the prize** of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

“I press on toward the goal”

For many of us this is natural whether it is pursuits in school, in your career, for our family, etc. We are making goals, often counting the costs, and consistently making decisions to help us achieve our goals.

Some of my LifeGroup leaders have heard this story, but I think it again applies so if you know it hear it again with fresh ears.

The story of Getting Sadie up the hill.

Our family does a lot of bike riding. This spring we decided to check out a new spot off of Polo Rd. Not sure if you have been down Polo Rd recently, but there are some pretty significant hills. So we go down the first hill and everyone loves it. Of course, everyone loves going fast down a hill. The problem is when you go down, you must come back up. So we face this big hill and we start climbing up it together as a family. As we are going, I begin to hear crying and whimpering and soon my middle daughter Sadie stops. I tell everyone to keep going and pull over with her.

“Sadie, what’s wrong.”

“Dad it’s too hard. My legs hurt. I cant do it. I dont want to do this.”

“I get it. I understand, but we as a family ride bikes and I know you can do this. We will get up this hill together.”

So we start back climbing and as we crest the top, everyone else is cheering and clapping.

“Way to go Sadie.”

I tell them to keep going, Sadie and I will catch up later, but right now we need to ride and talk together.

“Sadie what happens if everytime life gets hard and you want to quit and give up? What if dad let’s you quit? What happens to you if I let you quit every time things get difficult and challenging?”

A little 7 year old came to a realization that just because something is hard and difficult it doesn't mean it isn't good and beneficial. Because she is part of our family and our family rides bikes.

There will be hills sometimes and if we gave up everytime she started crying we would never be a family that rides bikes.

So we talked through it and kept going. On the way back we faced that same gnarly hill. This time I said hey Sadie, let's see who can be king of the mountain. Who can make it to the top the fastest. So this time instead of tears, she realized I can do this, I have done it before. With a renewed mind, with confidence and grit she took off. She beat everyone to the top and she was smiling, beaming. She was so proud of herself because today she got better, today she overcame a difficulty and she didn't just survive, she won. She pressed on toward the goal.

My point isn't Sadie, my point is this, Paul is giving us this same pep talk. Don't give up. I know its hard and I know it can be difficult. But it is good and it is worth it. Press on toward the goal. In this passage, he gave us two instructions on how to keep pressing on toward the goal.

How does Paul press on? Forgetting and Straining.

1) Forgetting what lies behind -

Let me give you some categories on how to think through this. To forget what lies behind is not a wholesale amnesia. We know this because of the repetitive command given to "remember." Forgetting and remembering are both active disciplines of the mind and are both commanded to help us press on.

We are instructed to remember God's goodness, God's faithfulness, God's character, God's promises in order to help us keep going and to give us the assurance to walk in confidence.

In contrast, we are instructed to forget anything that might weigh us down, anything that might hold us back, anything that might provide resistance. It's like trying to run with a parachute attached to your back. We are to let go of our baggage, to run with freedom. This could be sin, guilt, shame, and regret. Maybe somethings you have done or what has been done to you. It could also be past accomplishments or successes. Resting on your laurels rather than aggressively moving forward. Either way, the instruction is to forget, drop anything that prevents you from running.

Questions to help us press on.

Question 1) What do you need to forget? What do you need to let go of? What do you need to move on from?

2) In our effort to press on Paul says he is "Straining forward to what lies ahead" - push yourself to the limit. Exert your body to the point of collapse. Exhaustion. When exercising the ones who progress the most realize that the brain is stronger than the body. As in, the body will want to give up and your brain will have to tell it to keep going. Grit Ride: climbing a mountain, just dont stop pedalling.

What does it mean to bring that kind of single minded focus and energy to my relationship with God? What does it mean to have godly grit?

Straining forward, pressing onward. Train yourself for Godliness. What does it look like for you to strive, to toil, to discipline yourself so that you don't wander aimlessly because as we said earlier no one stumbles into godliness.

Question 2 to help you “press on” Are you running toward the prize? Are you striving in the right direction? Do you have Godly grit and determination to keep going? What needs to change and how and when do you plan to change it?

So we forget what lies behind and we strain toward the goal. Now Paul encourages us to look and learn. To get our eyes up and learn from those around us. He gives us both positive and negative examples.

¹⁵ Let those of us who are **mature** think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷ **Brothers, join in imitating me**, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to **the example you have in us**.

Back a few years ago I was talking with someone who was frustrated with their LifeGroup. Her main complaint was that not everyone in her group was spiritually mature. There were things about their immaturity that bothered her and she felt like their immaturity was holding her and the group back. She said I really wish I was in a group where everyone was at the same level of maturity. If that was the case then the group would really gain traction and we all could grow super fast.

I must admit, it was a good day for filterman because I was able to control my gut reaction and my snarky thoughts. I wanted to say you are exactly right, our church would be so much better if only everyone was as mature as you. Instead of sarcasm, I was actually able to agree with her.

You know what, I often want the same thing, it just seems like it would be easier and therefore better if everyone was more mature. The problem is that is not exactly what the Bible instructs us. The call is for the mature to bear with the weak, for the mature to instruct and correct and lead the immature. This is God's design for us. Those who are further along are called to bring others with them. “Go and make disciples...”

Here is the kicker, helping others is actually the very thing that mature people need to continue to grow. The way of Jesus is the way of a servant. Pouring oneself out for the good of others. We grow when we are forced to practice the one another. When by God's grace and sovereignty we are called to bear with one another, when we must carry one another, when we must forgive when sinned against, when we must be patient with the annoying person, when we must...

Paul says to follow the mature. Watch them. Imitate them.

Mature -. Those who are closer to completion. Those who are moving towards a specific desired end. Further along. Full grown.

Let's talk a minute about maturity. What does it mean to be mature in Christ.

1. **Maturity is someone moving in the right direction.** Someone who has pressed on toward perfection. Who is further along in the journey toward a specific goal. The mature have a single minded goal to know Jesus and to be conformed into his image. They are aggressively running in that direction. Not easily distracted. Focused on the prize
2. **Maturity is recognizing you are not there yet.** They have humility and confidence. Not yet arrived but moving in the right direction. Without confidence and self awareness, Paul would not be able to say "follow me." Join me because I know the way. Imitate me because I am further along.
3. **Maturity is bring others along the journey with you.** Discipleship - helping someone take the next step toward Jesus, toward maturity, toward the end goal. Communal pursuit. Watch and follow the example of others. Join in with those around you.

Question 3) - How can you help bring others along? Should people follow you? What might need to change in order for you to call others to follow you?

¹⁸For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

Walk as enemies to the cross.

What does this mean? Enemies are in opposition to, they actively fight against the cross. 4 things we know about enemies of the cross.

First, instead of their end being eternal life with Jesus, their end will be destruction. The Bible speaks of hell as a very real place. It is a place of weeping, wailing, gnashing of teeth, darkness, burning, torments, and everlasting punishment. Another way to say it, its a place where God gives you what you want. Autonomy and freedom from the goodness and grace of Jesus and therefore it is a place of destruction.

Second, instead of worshipping and following Jesus, they make their appetites their God The beginning of maturity is self mastery. The discipline to do what is right and the self control to abstain from what is wrong. Those who walk as enemies of the cross are controlled and mastered by their appetites, their desires. They dont experience the freedom found in Christ to say no to sin and its slavery. They arent empowered by the Holy Spirit to live self-controlled upright lives. They have not eaten from the Bread of Life nor drank from the fountain of living water. They still hunger and thirst and look for things of this earth to satisfy them.

Making your appetite your God can look many different ways:

- Lazy and unmotivated living
- Wanderlust, catching the next great experience
- Romance and the pursuit to find your soulmate
- Caught up in an addiction - sex, drugs, alcohol
- Consumed with the pursuit of fame, wealth, and pleasure.

Instead of rejoicing in the goodness of God, they glory in their shame. They rejoice in the inverse of what is good and right.

We did a whole series on the enemies that attack us (The World, the Flesh and the Devil) and our tagline was “our enemy the devil feeds us deceitful ideas, that play to our disordered desires, that are normalized by a sinful society.” Meaning we can easily be deceived into confusing wrong for right. Those who are enemies of the cross celebrate their ignorance and revel in their wrongness.

Examples:

- Vegging out on TV, Social Media, or Video Games and calling it good self care.
- Gossiping and slandering people in your life and calling it healthy venting.
- Exploiting employees and calling it good business sense.
- Being controlled by your sexual desires is called sexual freedom.
- Abortion, taking the life of a child is called women’s healthcare.
- Storming the capital is called patriotism.

The enemies of the cross glory in their shame. They celebrate what ought to be condemned.

Lastly Paul says instead of having an eternal heavenly focus, they are only concerned with temporary earthly matters.

The hope of heaven. Eternal life with Jesus. This is the foundation for Christian living. We realized that this world around us isn't our home. We have something better that awaits us. All of this temporal, earthly life is a warm-up for what is to come. We know that the world as it is won't last and our time on this earth is limited. These great truths have practical implications in our everyday life. It impacts our use of time, our relationships, how we spend/save our money, what we value, etc.

Enemies of the cross are blinded to the realities of heaven and therefore their sole focus is the here and now.

This sober reality is why Paul warns the church with tears in his eyes: don't choose this. Don't let go of Jesus to hold onto the things of this world. It won't give you what you want. It won't give you life to the fullest. Press ahead. Hold on for the sake of Jesus. Find life in Jesus. Find your joy in Jesus and the things of His Kingdom.

Question 4) What is distracting or side tracking you from pressing onward? Are there areas of your life that need to be confessed and what does repentance look like for you moving forward?

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. 4 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, **stand firm** thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Our citizenship is in heaven. We are destined for eternity with God. We eagerly await his return and we eagerly hasten his coming. Forever and ever. A place free of sin, a place free from brokenness where death is no more. No more pain. No more tears. No more exhaustion. A place overflowing with love and joy and peace with God and His people for all of time.

Until then, we as citizens of heaven and we function as a colony of heaven. Philippi was a colony of Rome. A colony is a city or region not just under the rule of Rome but it was a means to bring Rome to a region. Philippi was populated by Romans who were loyal to Rome who sought to make the region more like Rome.

Part of what Paul is saying is that just like the Philippians were Roman citizens seeking to Romanize their region, we as citizens of Heaven are to Heavenize our city. One way we have said this before is, "In Columbia as it is in Heaven." We seek to bring the rule and reign of king Jesus in our city.

Family we have a mission and a goal. We must press on. We must hold on.

- So we abide in Jesus regularly and routinely in an effort to joyfully treasure him above all else.
- So we confess and repent regularly and routinely in our LifeGroups in an effort to earnestly grow in his likeness.
- We practice the one anothers in our LifeGroup and we model the way of Jesus in an effort to continually bring others with us.
- We cultivate rhythms and build relationships with our neighbors in an effort to bring the hope of heaven to our city and the people around us.

We "press on", we "hoood on" because one day Jesus will come back. And one day He will raise up our broken, lowly bodies and restore us into glorious communion with Him.

But until then, we press on.