



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Mindset

Relentless Joy, Philippians 3:12-16

Steve Lombardo | April 5, 2020



We've been walking through the book of Philippians in our series entitled "Relentless Joy" and I've been thankful to the Lord for it. I don't know about you, but especially in our day and age, God in His sovereignty has seen fit to bring us to this book at this juncture in life. It's been encouraging to me and I hope it's been encouraging to you.

The book of Philippians has been a source of joy for Christians throughout the centuries. If you know any believers who have lived for any length of time, and you take a look at their well-worn Bibles; you can see Philippians is probably worn almost all the way through. That's because it's been a source of joy for people as they go to these words the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write to a church that he started and a church that he loved.

So it's my honor and privilege to bring the Word of God to you today. If you have your Bibles, let's get to God's Word together. We'll start in Philippians 3:12:

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

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. 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.

The whole process of living starts in your head. How you think is vitally important and correlates with how much joy you have in this life. It all begins in the mind; how you think is so important. In the realm of sports, this quickly becomes evident. I played sports. You probably guessed that by now, watching me. You're probably thinking basketball, perhaps body building. [That was a joke, by the way.] Last week Pastor Tim joked about his family being the A+ family during the lockdown. I don't know if everybody got it. He was just kidding about that. He's got an A+ family—don't get me wrong—but they weren't making that music. I've got to spell that out.

Joking aside, I'm not a body builder. It's been several years since I competed professionally with body building. In sports, you have to have the mentality of being a winner. One of the guys who was the best at this was Michael Jordan. I mean, he was cutthroat. He was a winner through and through. He was sharp as can be. If you played sports or if you know sports at all, you know you have to be in the correct state of mind in order to compete the best you can and in order to make a difference for your team.

Now, if you played baseball, for example, one of the toughest things for a player is to get over being hit by a pitch. My brother got hit in the hand by a pitch in little league baseball. It broke his hand, but he went on to become a Navy SEAL and there aren't too many things he's afraid of. But I'll bet you I could easily strike him out today. Why? Because he never got over the fact of that inside fast ball coming in. It's in his head. He might have words with me after he listens to this, but I think I could strike him out because he would not be thinking, "Line drive up the middle." He would be thinking, "Please don't hit my hand and break it again."

We live in a day of fear and anxiety. It's increasing all the time. Yesterday Governor Cuomo of New York said, "The fear we have, the anxiety we have, is not just going to go away." Now, he's correct. We do live in a day and age of fear. I'm not given to depression or sadness very easily, but can I just be honest with you, God's people? I found myself dealing with those emotions and struggling with them, even in the day-to-day activities of life.

It is so important to stop and examine the way we are thinking, so that we might think like Christ wants us to think. The Bible has plenty to say about our minds and how we are to think. Just look at these verses:

- 2 Timothy 1:7 (NKJV), "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."
- Isaiah 26:3, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you." How we need that today!
- Colossians 3:2, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."

- Romans 12:2, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*
- Then later in this letter we’re studying, Philippians 4:8, *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”*

It is so critical that we guard our minds. This truth has led some people to call it “the battlefield of our mind.” So let me give you the big idea today: **the mindset of the Christian is to press on!**

I want to start in Philippians 3:15-16, then go backwards to 12, 13 and 14, because I think Paul kind of summarizes what we’re talking about today. Verse 15: *“Let those of us who are mature think this way.”* So this “way” he’s talking about—the thing we’re going to be studying today—that’s how mature believers think. Paul is saying, “Heads up. This is for mature Christians.” He goes on with, *“And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.”* It’s such a loving thing for Paul to say. “Hey, if you don’t get it now—maybe you’re not completely on the same page as me on this—but I have no doubt God is going to reveal this to you too. So keep studying. Keep pressing on. God will reveal it to you.” Paul is not hammering the church, he’s encouraging them.

Then in verse 16 he adds, *“Only let us hold true to what we have attained.”* “If you don’t get it all, that’s okay. But what you do understand, hey, hold on to that. Grasp that strongly. Run with that. Press on with that. Live with the knowledge you have attained. Live together as you honor Christ in your lives.”

This is the end of our little section we’re looking at today, where Paul is saying, “Think this way.” So right now, as you’re in your living room with your kids, or you’re on your phone, or wherever you are, what we’re talking about right now is for mature believers. This is for Christians who “get it.” I want to be that. I don’t know about you, but I want to understand God and His will for me. So now let’s go back to Philippians 3:12.

1. Press on with spiritual discernment.

So again, the big idea is this: the mindset of the Christian is to press on! The first way we press on is with spiritual discernment. We see this in verse 12: *“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”*

Paul says he has not obtained this. What is the “this” he’s referring to? What has he not obtained? I think in the immediate context it’s in verse 11, *“...that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”* He hasn’t gotten that yet. Simply put, this refers to the complete victory in Jesus Christ. It’s out of Paul’s grasp. Paul was sitting in prison. He doesn’t know if he’ll be experiencing this right around the corner, but he knows he’s not there yet. He’s on the path, but the complete victory has not been won.

Paul is discerning enough to know that he’s not perfect. He confesses that in verse 12. He knows he is a sinner. He’s not perfect in the sense that Christ was perfect. But as Pastor Tim said last week, he wasn’t comparing himself to other people. Some in the church were claiming to already be glorified. They thought they had achieved the status. But in humility, Paul is saying, “I’m not perfect. I haven’t arrived.”

Paul is also discerning that Jesus was the One Who saved him. The only reason Paul is still on the upward path is because Christ Jesus “apprehended” him, as it says in the old King James Version. He grabbed me My ESV says, *“Because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”* . That’s true. God, in His mercy and grace, grabbed Saul by the scruff of his neck when he was persecuting the church. Jesus saved him and set his feet on solid ground. That’s the conversion that happened to Saul. He wasn’t trying to find Jesus. He wasn’t on a journey to seek salvation. He was actually against Christ and Christ’s people. But Jesus met him and saved him, and Saul didn’t have anything to do with that. Yet after he was saved, he said, “I’ve got to do all I can with the days I have left to live for this Jesus Who saved me.” It took spiritual discernment to realize that.

Realize you are not perfect and you are not better than anyone else.

So let me apply this idea of spiritual discernment to our lives today. When we press on, when we’re living for the Lord, first, it means we’re not perfect and we’re not better than anybody else. Can we all agree with that? If you’re a Christian who is living with spiritual discernment, you can confess that you’re not perfect and you’re not better than anybody else.

Realize you are special, not because you worked really hard and found God, but that God—by His sheer love and grace—reached down into the pit and came up with you.

Not only that, can you say with the Apostle Paul that you are special, but it's not because you worked really hard to gain Christ. You're special because Christ, in His love and mercy, reached down into the miry pit, grabbed you by the scruff of your neck and set your feet on solid ground—even though you were dead in your trespasses and sins. Get that. You didn't save yourself. God saved you by His rich love and mercy. He came to you and loved you and saved you. So let's confess that today as His people. To be blown away by these realities is spiritual discernment.

When we live with this kind of understanding, we will flourish. When we live in a way that puts others first, confessing that we're not better than anybody else and that it was the common grace of God that has given us this life and His special grace that saved us, Village Bible Church will flourish. But it won't be to make us a showcase for the sinless. Rather, we will become a hospital for the hurting. Our desire should be to build a place where people are honest with one another, love each other and are willing to get down in the dirt with those who haven't yet been saved out of the mire. We must pray that God will also save them. The mindset of a Christian is to press on.

2. Press on with spiritual dissatisfaction.

Not only are we to press on with spiritual discernment, we also need to press on with spiritual dissatisfaction. Yes, you heard that right. We need to have dissatisfaction in our spiritual life. Look at Philippians 3:13: *"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."*

Paul is reiterating the fact that he hasn't made it there yet. He hasn't yet crossed the finish line. But he does have one thing: he is *"forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead."*

This past Wednesday our student ministry youth group gathered together using Zoom online. We talked and prayed and went through this Scripture right here. I asked them, "Tell me what you think Paul needed to forget. Maybe Paul needed to forget persecuting the church when he was Saul. Maybe he needed to forget the problems he had with some of the church leaders after he became Paul, forgiving them and moving on. Or maybe he forgave some of the people who accused him of not really being an apostle."

Then I asked our students, "What are some things people have a hard time forgetting?" Here are a few of their answers:

- "One thing people can't forget is heartbreak."
- "One thing people can't forget is betrayal."
- "I think people can't forget all the regrets for things they didn't do."
- "People can't forget abuse that happened in the past."
- "I think one thing people can't forget is death."

These young people realize that *"forgetting what lies behind"* is sometimes hard to do. Some of those hurts run deep and it's hard to move past them. As they age, this challenge will only increase. The more we live life, the more we realize we can end up carrying a lot of baggage, but Christ has come to free us from that. Paul says, "I haven't made it yet. I'm still on the path. I'm still pressing on and I have a way to go. I'm not perfect. God is doing a work in me. But one thing I have is this: I'm forgetting what lies behind and I'm straining toward what lies ahead."

Let me give you three things we struggle to forget, to add to the things our students mentioned.

We struggle to forget past sin.

These are things you've done; and if you're honest, you're ashamed of them. You've been forgiven, but those sins still bring a sense of shame.

We're going to take some time right now, right where you are—that's the beautiful thing about technology, you can get with your family and start confessing your sins to one another. Talk about what you're ashamed of. No, I'm not really asking you to do that. Why not? Because I'm not willing to do that. I'm not willing to sit here and confess to you all the things that might bring me shame from my past. But do you know what? I don't have to, because Christ Jesus has forgiven these things. He has redeemed me from my past.

If God doesn't remember my sin any longer, I don't have to either. My sins are under the blood of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 13:6 we read that love doesn't keep any record of wrongdoings. God loves us with a perfect and everlasting love, so when we repent and turn to Him in faith, He forgives us because of the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ. Our transgressions are removed as far as the east is from the

west (Psalm 103:12). Our sins are gone, they're remembered no more and by God's grace we can forget the things that lie behind. We can forget our past sins.

Some of you may need to help your spouse forget those past sins. You've been acting like the devil, reminding them of those sins, but that's not the love of God. God's love forgives, forgets and removes those sins. However, husbands, wives, don't play the part of the Holy Spirit either. It's not your job to convict your spouse.

We struggle to forget past successes.

In some ways, Paul could have depended on the ministry success he had experienced. It was incredible. He had planted churches. He had grown disciples. He had been in prison for his faith in Jesus Christ. Paul could look back to his resumé, not only from before he was a Christian, as Pastor Tim talked about last week, but also since he had become a Christian. It's pretty incredible what he had done in those few short years. But instead, Paul didn't count on his past successes and neither should we.

We can't depend on our past success. Only the Chicago Cubs can do that and it's okay, at least for a while. But even they have to win a World Series every once in a while.

We struggle to forget past sorrow.

We struggle to forget our past sins and our past success, and finally, we struggle to forget our past sorrow. This is tough. We experience many things that break our hearts which can disable us from fruitful work for Christ. I understand how hard it is to let go of grief.

I know he was just a dog, but Bruno just died about a month ago. He was 16 years old and we had to put him down. I'm finding myself coming into the house, wanting to call his name, but he's not there. I even still leave a little food on my plate to take to him. The other day I was cleaning the garage and saw his food bowl. I'm not a crier, but I got close that day—and even right now. Here's the thing. We don't need to move past our sorrows too quickly. If I move through my grief too quickly, it seems disrespectful to him. I want to feel it for a while, because he meant a lot to me. Maybe you're thinking, "Too bad your dog died. I'm dealing with the death of a loved one." I just learned about someone in our congregation whose grandmother died from the virus; that's the real deal. That's much more than a dog dying.

But there's a new day dawning. We don't have to sit in our grief. God calls us to walk through our grief and He walks through it with us. Still, for any grief we have—especially the loss of a loved one—we are able to entrust that to God Almighty and can experience a new day. We can forget the pain that lies behind and we can press on to the goal that lies ahead.

3. Press on with spiritual discipline.

So, what's ahead? Good question. Paul answers that in verse 14: *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* We press on with spiritual discernment and with spiritual dissatisfaction. We're not going to be satisfied with where we're at in our walk with God. But then third, we press on with spiritual discipline.

Paul again uses the phrase *"press on"* in verse 14. He also uses a similar phrase in verse 13, *"straining forward."* In both of these, Paul is speaking of discipline. This is language one would use when referring to athletic competitions. Pressing on, straining, following on, going forward—all of these take discipline.

Let me say this in all love: most people are lazy. Most people break their New Year's resolutions by January 3rd. Most people say one thing and yet do another. Most people fail. But remember, we're not talking about salvation here when we're talking about spiritual discipline. We're talking about how we're running the race, how sanctification is coming. We're talking about the life we're living in Christ. Aren't you thankful that your salvation is not dependent on you?

As Pastor Tim said last week so clearly, it's not on your shoulders. It's not because of the connections you have. It's not due to the categories in life you keep. Paul isn't saying, "If you do everything right, if your good outweighs your bad, God is going to welcome you into heaven." I'm so thankful our salvation isn't dependent on these things; rather, our salvation rests on Christ.

Paul is not talking about that here; he's talking about our sanctification. He reminds us why we're pressing on; why we're straining forward. It's for *"the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

What is the prize? I would say, in this immediate context, it's found in Philippians 3:11: *"that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."* It's victory in Jesus. It's the glory of Christ Himself, of the God of the universe. It's to know Christ and to experience His love and power in deeper and deeper ways. That's the goal. That's the prize we're pressing on toward. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith; He's the One we press into and the One we press on with, even in fearful times when we're filled with anxiety.

Many years ago, I was in a regional track meet in Yorkville. I was a fifth grader in my little grade school and this was a big meet, at least in my mind, especially for our little school. I was doing the mile run. I started the mile with all the other boys. I was the littlest and the youngest, because the race went up through eighth grade. What I didn't know when we started was that some distance behind us, the girls also started at the same time. As we ran the race, I tried to run as hard as I could, but those other guys were like world-class sprinters and they annihilated me. But I was still giving it my all.

I was coming around the bend for the last straightaway. My parents were in the stands, along with others from my school. As everyone was watching, I started hearing an eruption of cheers. They were cheering me on, but I didn't know what was happening. Then I looked back and saw that one of the girls was closing in on me. Well, that fired me up. I did not want to lose to this girl. I don't think Usain Bolt could have beat me to the finish line. I felt like I was running on air. I crossed the finish line in last place, but at least that girl didn't catch me. I know that in our day and age, that's probably a politically incorrect way to think. I realize there are a lot of fast girls. Most women today could beat me in a foot race.

But here's the thing. Paul was comparing life to running a race. As we face on an ever-increasing basis the fear, anxiety and even despair in our day, this image can help us fix our eyes on the goal, on the finish line. Our goal is Christ Himself. When we fix our eyes on Him, it can motivate us to go full bore into the life He has called us to.

With everything happening around us and possibly even everything we know crumbling around us—from our 401ks to our government to our country—our eyes need to be fixed on Jesus. We read in Hebrews 12:2-3:

Looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

That's my prayer for me, for my family and for our church, in Jesus' name.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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