

What If You're Climbing the Wrong Ladder?

Adam Davidson

BIG IDEA

True flourishing is found in knowing Christ and pursuing Him.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Philippians 3:1-14

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1. Paul is intentionally redundant in this short letter, referencing joy some 16+ times. In 3:1, he offers no apology for his repetition, adding that rejoicing is more than a directive; it is a safeguard. How does choosing joy in all circumstances protect us? How is this gospel joy different from a general "positive mindset" approach?
 2. Read Romans 2:25-29, remembering that physical circumcision was an outward sign of the Old Covenant, ultimately fulfilled by the New Covenant in Christ. The symbolism shifts from physical to spiritual circumcision, thus the issue Paul raises in 3:2-3. Why might someone be more confident with the outward than the inward? Why might someone put more stock in their heritage rather than the gospel? Does this happen today?
 3. Paul takes great care in listing his credentials (7!) in 3:4-6. One might think he's boasting if it weren't for the next verse, where he calls it garbage, which is a conservative translation of the Greek word for dung or human/animal waste. Although we're far removed from his ancient era, it should be noted that Paul's is a pretty strong resume. What's his point in bringing these attributes up one by one? How do we handle "the resume" in our world today, and what effect does it have on how we view and present ourselves to others?
 4. In the Old Covenant, Paul was at the top of the list. A+. But oh, how the tables turn! Why might it be necessary to consider his old report card rubbish instead of building on it? Why not leave both columns -- strengths in the Old with strengths in the New? Read Hebrews 10:1-18 before you answer this.
 5. What's the difference between knowing Christ and knowing about Christ? Read 1 John 4:7-21, feeling both the weight and the relief of being in relationship with Jesus. Is this what Paul is talking about in Philippians 3:10-11?
 6. 3:12 reminds us that even a guy responsible for writing half of the New Testament doesn't consider himself to have "already obtained all this...". When we talk about flourishing, what are some things you can personally testify to that exemplifies how your roots are growing, or how your leaves are multiplying, or how God is producing fruit... you get the image. Tell the story about how you are still a work in progress.

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7. Why is it so hard to forget what lies behind and strain toward what is ahead? Is it possible to be weighed down by something behind us that's good?

8. Read Hebrews 12:1-4 in conjunction with Philippians 3:13-14. Did you notice that Paul looks back at events through the lens of the gospel and looks ahead -- not to events, but to a person and a prize? How can we have eyes of faith that see past events and statuses that once defined us as something to be left behind? How can we focus on the future as looking to Jesus rather than looking to events?

9. If you're in a spot where you're feeling hopeless, what does Philippians 3:1-14 remind us? How might the Holy Spirit change your view of past, present, and future in light of Jesus, who suffered (lowest point) and resurrected (highest point), and how do we put our hope in him? How is God lifting you to flourish under pressure?

10. Such a joyful letter was written by a guy imprisoned for spreading the gospel to lost people. He writes so that the church at Philippi would keep going. The chains don't stop Paul from serving others. How can we make sure that, as a group, we're not only building community around the Word but actually living the Word by serving others? Where can you bring hope and healing in your community this week? How can God use you to "write a letter from prison" as you take the next step to help (Hebrews 6:10)?