

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Joy Comes in the Journey

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Scripture:

Philippians 3:12-14

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Transcript:

Good morning to those of you here in the room. Good morning if you are worshiping online. My name's Annie Duncan. I'm the executive pastor here and it is so great to be with you on this wonderful sunny August morning. A few years ago, I hiked the Enchantments with some of my friends. Anybody out there ever hiked the Enchantments? I see a couple hands. Yes, we know. We know. We'll get to that in a second, but the Enchantments, they'd been on my bucket list for a couple years and when I found out that my crossfit gym was putting a crew together to hike through, I raised my hand eagerly and I signed up. If you don't know, the Enchantments are just this beautiful hike outside of Leavenworth in the mountains and the only way that you can see the beauty of the Enchantments is by hiking to them.

And it's not an easy hike. It's 26 miles and it boasts 6,500 feet of elevation gain. And the morning of the hike we got up at 3:00 AM so that we could get out there on the trail head nice and early to start those 26 miles and the first lake that we came to is Colchuck Lake. And it's this beautiful lake. And as you stand on the side of the lake you look with anticipation across to the other side of the lake because on the other side of the lake is Aasgard Pass. Aasgard Pass. I mean, that sounds like something out of Lord of the Rings, right? There it is and you're looking at it and it's just vast and we're going to come back to Assgard Pass in a moment.

We are currently in a sermon series walking through the Book of Philippians. And in Philippians, there is a lot of joy. Despite Paul writing this letter and he's in prison, he writes to the church at Philippi. He does so in this posture of joy. He rejoices in the Lord. He rejoices in the church there at Philippi. He rejoices in suffering. And as we see in the scripture today, he rejoices as he's pressing on. So Philippians 3:12 through 14, "Not that I've already obtained all of this, or I've already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do for getting what's behind and straining toward the goal of what's ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God had called me heaven word in Christ Jesus."

So Paul says a lot in these three verses. And so join me as we walk through this passage of scripture and simultaneously we are going to hike through the Enchantments together. Paul uses athletic imagery in a lot of his writings, and he also does so in these verses that we just read. And to him like it's this perfect metaphor, athletic imagery is this perfect metaphor, just like hiking, how we're pressing on towards a finish line. And one thing is clear to Paul as we follow Christ. Joy comes in the journey. So in verse 12, Paul starts by saying, "Not that I've already obtained all of this." So what's the this that Paul's talking about? What's he referring to? Well, back in verse 10, which Scott Dudley preached on last week, Paul says this. He says, "I want to know Christ. Yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

In that word to know when Paul says, I want to know Christ, it's in the Greek, it's not referring to head knowledge, but to know Christ as Paul's describing it here is something really deep and intimate. It's a relationship, which is why Paul then describes it as like he wants to experience Jesus' power. He wants to experience the same suffering that Jesus did. For Paul, it's not just ticking off the facts of what he knows about Jesus, but it's experiencing Jesus, experiencing Jesus in relationship. So in verse 12, when Paul says, "Not that I've already obtained all of this, or I've arrived at my goal," he's saying that while he knows Jesus and his power and love, he wants to experience it more and more. For Paul, it's a process. So joy comes in the journey and first it's a process.

Paul knows that joy comes in the journey of following Jesus, because that's what he's experiencing. Like an athlete that has yet to reach their goal, Paul sees himself in the middle of the pack, he's still on this journey. He hasn't accomplished what he's striving for and that's greater closeness to Jesus. So back at Asgard Pass, at this point in our hike journey we're about five miles in. We've already climbed 2,500 feet so far. And at the base of Asgard Pass, we look up and we know that we have to climb 2,000 feet in three quarters of a mile, which really shouldn't be considered hiking. It's climbing at this point. I'm surprised we didn't have ropes. We should have, but here's a quick video of us at the midway point, halfway up Asgard Pass.

So we're still going up at this point, still going very much so up. And because we're doing a bit more of climbing than we actually are hiking at this point, even though we're only halfway through that three quarters of a mile, it has taken us an hour just to get to that halfway point. So then after another hour, we finally reach the top and here's a quick video of what the top looked like.

So we finally see some descent. We're not climbing anymore. We have reached the top. And as we looked down below to everything that we had just climbed from, Colchuck Lake and Aasgard pass, we looked what was in front of us as well. And we were all just captivated. It had taken us five hours to go six miles and we had another 20 miles to go. And while we knew we had a long way to go, we had accomplished so much already. And that I think in essence is what Paul's getting at here in verse 12. He had come a long way in his journey with Jesus, but he also knew that he had a long way to go yet. And Paul recognizes that it's a process. He had not arrived at his goal. And his goal is closeness, closeness to Jesus. And he reiterates this to the church at Philippi that he hasn't got there yet.

And he makes this statement because he doesn't want the church at Philippi to think that here I am, Paul, I'm this 100% fully developed Christian that completely understands God's grace and has experienced everything there is to know about Jesus. No, Paul does not want the church at Philippi to think that about him. Paul wants to communicate to the Philippians that in order to be a mature Christian, you've got to know as a mature Christian that you're still growing. You're always growing. It's a process. And it's a joy filled process where there's still so much to be discovered. So Paul goes on to say in verses 12 and 13, "But I press on to take hold of that which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it."

Again, Paul is drawing on this theme of it's a work in progress. And these repeated words here of Paul wanting to take hold of what Jesus took hold of him, and then saying how Paul hasn't quite taken hold of that yet, what's Paul talking about? He's talking about grace. He's talking about God's grace. All that Jesus has done for Paul and for us, which brings us to our second point. Joy comes in the journey because it's a process and we get to embrace grace. It's Jesus that has taken a hold of Paul. And it's out of God's grace, that all Paul has to do is just respond to that grace and that overwhelming love. And he says, I have yet to fully comprehend it. Up until Jesus got a hold of Paul, Paul had accomplished a ton in his life. He came from a great family. He was scholarly. He was learned. But while there were so many things that Paul did, the thing that Paul is eager to do is take hold of what Jesus did for Paul and for all.

His death and resurrection, Jesus' power and love. All without us having to do anything to earn it. That's the grace that Paul is trying to take hold of. And he's like, I haven't done it yet. I'm eager to take hold of it, but I haven't taken hold of it yet. So here's another picture of our descent along the way, this lovely little goat in the mountain tops. And I thought it was fitting to put this picture here, because what Paul is saying in these verses is radical because Paul is

literally the GOAT, the greatest of all time. But he's also saying here, like I've got a lot to learn. I still got a lot to comprehend. Paul's one of the most, if not the most influential people that helped Christianity to spread. And so as we read these words that Paul's like I haven't fully grasped God's grace yet, but I want to, I hope that gives all of us hope, knowing that maybe our brains and we can't fully understand God's love. That's okay.

Paul couldn't either. He's admitting it right here to the church at Philippi. So again, Paul goes back to his desire to know, and not just know with his head, but know and experience Jesus' love and grace. So back at the Enchantments, here's this gorgeous picture of an Alpine lake we passed through at midday. We took the time to rehydrate and fill our filters and get some more water. And there's this difference, right? Between knowing and experiencing, as Paul's talking about it here to the church at Philippi. And there's a lot of facts that I know about the Enchantments. I've already told you a few of them, right? It's a 26 mile through hike. You climb 6,500 feet of elevation gain. Aasgard Pass, while it's only three quarters of a mile, you climb 2,000 feet in those three quarters of a mile. There's a lot of facts that I know about the Enchantments, but it's not the facts of the hike that take hold of people.

It's the sheer beauty. It's as you're hiking and you're experiencing, oh my gosh, look at this snow packed mountain. Oh my gosh, look at this Alpine lake. That's what takes a hold of you. And I hiked through the Enchantments in the summer, but I've had friends that have hiked through in the fall and they say, oh my gosh, the colors, the leaves changing. It's absolutely surreal. This is what Paul's talking about when he says he hasn't quite fully embraced what Jesus has given us, this grace, because it's too beautiful. It's too vast. He hasn't taken it all in. It's captured Paul. It's changed his life forever and he wants to continue to strive after it. That's his goal. So in light of that, in light of Paul recognizing that it's this process that it takes a journey to embrace God's grace, he goes on to say, "But one thing I do forgetting what's behind and straining towards what's ahead."

And we'll pause there for a second. So two times now in the verses that we've walked through, Paul has told us what he hasn't been able to do. First, he says he hasn't been able to fully know Jesus completely. He's eager to do it. And then second, he says he hasn't fully been able to embrace Jesus' grace, which he's also eager to do. He wants to comprehend that. But now we get to this point where Paul says what he is able to do. He says, "I forget what's behind me. And I keep moving forward." Keep moving forward. That's something Pastor Alexis says all the time. Pastor Annie, we must keep moving forward. Alexis gets this. Paul gets this. Paul is so fixated on what's in front of him, the resurrected life of glory that we're going to have in Jesus that he prefers to forget what's happened for the sake of fixing on what's about to happen.

And it's not that Paul's just like looking at his past and saying, oh, I'm forgetting all of that. Because in the verses that Scott walked through last week, Paul's talking about his past. He's talking about where he came from. And if you know anything about Paul's past, you know that a lot of what he had in his past could have prevented him from where he was currently, where he was writing the Philippians. Paul used to persecute Christians. And now, he's an apostle creating Christians. There's a lot in Paul's past that could have prevented him from that. But Paul

says, nope, I'm going to keep moving forward. I'm going to forget. I've received forgiveness. I'm going to forget what I did in my past for the sake of knowing where I'm going and I'm going to keep moving forward.

Paul's hunger to know Jesus is so intense that what he has experienced before he leaves behind and he addresses this in a different way to the Corinthians. He says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone. The new is here." And for Paul, that new that is coming, it happens every day. Every day is the opportunity to be a new creation in Christ. And again, I think this is a hopeful message for us because maybe some of us are like Paul, where maybe we're on a journey where Paul was when he was persecuting Christians. And he's like, "Nope, this isn't the journey that I want to be on." And Jesus meets Paul and transforms his life. And he completely changes course. And he keeps moving forward there. Right?

Jesus transformed Paul. Okay. Back to the Enchantments. At this point in the hike, we are making the long descent. We still have hours to go. Some in our group have started to feel exhausted. Not me, of course. Right? But some, some had. Others were taking off their hiking boots and starting to patch blisters that had started to surface. We stopped and we had snacks together. We encouraged one another. And there was one person on our group that said about 15 miles in. She said, "Hey, I should probably let you all know that I've got a pretty severe ankle injury from a few years ago. So if it flares up, we may need to start taking it slow." And I'm thinking, "What the heck are you doing on this hike?" And as we closed in with about 10 minutes to go, her ankle did just that. It started to just flare up so much pain.

And we had to take our pace and slow it way, way back. But we started together and we were going to finish together and here we were. We were so close to the end. We were so close. We could taste the joy of that finish line, but we still had a little ways to go. And for Paul, I think that's where his biggest source of joy comes from because he knows the end game. Joy comes in the journey. It's a process. Embrace grace, keep moving forward, and know our end game. In verse 14, Paul says, "I press on. I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Paul continues with this focus. It's a singular aim and view. He's pressing on. He's not giving up, unlike an athlete that's maybe so far ahead in the pack, Paul's not slacking back. He is focused. He's pressing on and towards what? Toward the goal to win the prize that God has called him upwards or heaven words in Christ Jesus.

And even though this word heaven is used here in the NIV translation, Paul isn't talking about going to heaven because later on in verse 20 and 21, he talks about Jesus coming to us. Paul knows that when Jesus comes again, God's going to transform the world and transform our bodies, transform ourselves. It's the coming of the kingdom of God in fullness. So living in heaven's not the end game, the end game is living in God's redeemed and rescued world, which we get to see glimpses of now, but will someday see fully. And that is Paul's end game. That's what he's fixated on. And it transforms the way that he lives in the present because he has so much hope for what he knows is coming.

This past week, our high school and our middle school students, they went to camp... And yeah, all right. Yes, yes. I see you. And they left on Sunday and they were scheduled to return on Friday, but a few days in a handful of kids got sick and then a few hours later, more kids and students were getting sick. So they made the hard decision to come home one day early. And despite camp maybe not going exactly as planned, it's been really fun to see so many of their pictures on social media and just hear all the stories of the amazing time that they had. One student posted on social media. She said, "Even though the week was cut short, I was still a happy camper."

The end game for camp wasn't this formula that stated it had to be this perfect six day experience. But the students and leaders knew that there was joy in the journey. That it would be filled with community and Jesus, and that didn't have to happen in six days. It could also happen in five or four or three. So after 22 miles of hiking, the terrain has drastically changed. We are out of the snow capped mountains and we are down now in the trees, which is giving us a lot of hope, right? We are near the finish line. And as you get to the final four miles, there are downhill switch backs, switch back after switch back. And that sounds like a breeze, right? Oh, downhill. Oh, that's so easy. And while it was nice to not have to climb another Aasgard Pass, you are struggling at this point to stay upright because you're 14 hours in. Your legs are tired. They're a little shaky and you just are doing these switchbacks, which are just not as beautiful as the Alpine lakes and snow packed mountains.

So it's a bit torturous. And even though like our crew, we'd been through a lot together, we'd been through the process. We'd been through rallying and encouraging each other. I think in that moment, even so close to the finish line, if I could have snapped my fingers and just got to the end, I think I would have. We were so tired. But then I started to think about our support crew that was meeting us in the parking lot. And at one point in the switch backs, you can see the parking lot. You're still miles away, but you can see. It's there, which gives you hope. And I started to think about our support crew. They had dropped us off really early in the morning at the trail head. And they said, "We will see you at the end. We will see you at the finish line."

And the more I thought about them, I was like, "They're not just going to show up empty handed, right?" Like here we are 14 hours of hiking. We're sweaty, we're tired. We haven't tasted cold water in 14 hours. They're going to have something cold for us to drink. Right? So I started to share that good news with the crew that I was hiking with. I was like, "Let's go. Finish line. There's going to be icy cold beverages. We can do this." And as we cross the bridge to get to the parking lot, leaving the trail head, we see our support crew and they were sitting on an ice cold cooler, and they had ice cold beverages. You guys, you're not going to be surprised if you know me at all. But I literally started to cry as I drank an icy Gatorade. It tasted so good.

Paul, he presses on towards the goal. Paul can see the cooler of ice cold beverages in his future. He knows it. He believes in it. He knows it's going to be there. His endgame is clear and he rallies the church at Philippi and he rallies us to have that same mindset. So joy, it comes in the journey. It doesn't happen in a flash, but it's a process where we experience Jesus in new and powerful ways as we are on this journey together, following Jesus. We get to experience grace and embrace it. And then reembrace it, because we know we can't fully comprehend it. So this

week, look for where there is joy in your journey. Maybe you are new to following Jesus. And you look at those around you and they've maybe got years ahead of you. That's actually good news because we are not called to do this life alone, but we are called to be on this journey together and encourage one another.

Amen.

Yeah. So embrace grace. No matter where any of us are at in the journey of following Jesus, we all can embrace grace and let that sink from our head to our heart a little bit more. That while we were yet sinners, Jesus died for us. I don't think this side of glory I'm ever going to fully comprehend that. So keep moving forward because our end game is near. And whenever I meet anybody that has hiked the Enchantments, it's this little nugget where we're like we know. We've experienced that. We know what the grueling process is. We know what the beauty is of the Enchantments. And similarly, whenever we meet other brothers and sisters in Christ, it's like we get to have that same experience where we're like we know. We're on the same journey together and we get to encourage one another, lift each other up and continue to keep moving forward.

I'll close with this. Paul says, in another letter, he puts it like this. "You've been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden in Christ. When Christ who is in your life appears, then you also will appear in glory." So God, we thank you for the joy that we have access to in you. We thank you that no matter where we're at in this journey, we get to experience your love, your grace, your joy, and your hope in new and powerful ways. So God, I pray that over this whole community here, those here, those worshipping online, that even right here, right now in this moment, that we can experience you powerfully and be changed forever because of it. In your name, we pray. Amen.

Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?

- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

1. Paul says twice that he presses on (vv. 12 & 14). How would you describe your endurance in the Christian life? When is pressing on hardest for you? Have you ever thought about giving up? If so, describe what happened.
2. As disciples, our aim is to be like Jesus. Philippians 1:6 and 1 John 3:2 promise that this will eventually be brought to completion. In verse 12, Paul says he's not there yet and is eager to grow closer to Jesus. How is following Jesus an ongoing process in your life and the life of your community?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.