



Living in Resurrection Power - Week 1

Monday, April 1st - LIFE

I love Easter Sunday. I love worshiping in the morning with the Church, knowing that across the globe millions of believers are celebrating with me. I love gathering around the family table, sharing the ways God is redeeming and restoring each one of us. I love the Easter Story, how in the darkest hour of history, God prevailed, bringing resurrection and life.

I love Easter Sunday. But year after year, it seems I miss out on some of the depth of the holiday. But not because I'm not paying attention to Easter Sunday itself, quite the opposite actually. I expend a lot of time and energy preparing for the activities of the weekend- aligning family schedules so we can worship and fellowship together, cooking and cleaning to welcome guests to our home- but it's in all of this preparation and anticipation for Sunday that Holy Week and Good Friday slip right past without me noticing. I am so focused on celebrating Sunday, that I fail to sit in remembrance of what it took to get to Easter Sunday. The progression of growth, trial, and suffering leading to Easter helps us fully grasp the *significance* and *meaning* of new life, redemption, resurrection, and hope that results from the whole Easter narrative.

To fully understand Easter, you must understand everything that came first.

The Apostle Paul, a church planter and leader in the first church, captured this sentiment well in his letter to the church in Philippi- "**I want to know Christ**—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead." Philippians 3:10

"**I want to know Christ.**" What a simple and strong desire. Not that I want to know *about* Christ, but that I want to actually *know* him. To understand His heart and know that He understands mine. To be so relationally in tune with Him that I begin to mirror Him in my own actions and story. Paul understood that this level of closeness with Christ would result in new life and healing to a magnitude he couldn't really comprehend with his finite, human mind.

Maybe you share this sentiment with Paul. Maybe you've walked your whole life in church, but have never had an intimate relationship with Jesus. Perhaps you're in Paul's seat and you deeply desire to know Christ *more*, to experience a closer relationship with Him. Or maybe you've just walked through the doors of the church for the first time in a long time, or for the first time ever, and you grabbed this booklet because something in your heart said just that- "I want to know Christ." Regardless, this series is for you. This devotional is for you.

Here are a few things you need to know:

To know Christ is to know His Word and His Work. You get closer to friends and family when you hear them talk and share in their story. The absolute best way to pursue a deeper relationship with Jesus is to begin reading His words and His story in the Gospels. *Take time this week to read the gospel of Mark* (It's the shortest gospel).

To know Christ is to spend time with Him. I have read a lot of books about famous and influential people, but obviously I can't say I *know* any of them personally. The difference between reading those books and reading the Gospels? Christ can be *intimately and personally* known through reading His Word. We aren't just reading about Him from a distance- He sits with us, involved and engaged in the

process, speaking to us through the text, and listening to our hearts as we respond in prayer. Don't let your time in the Word just be factual and informational. *Invite Jesus into the room with you as you read.*

To know Christ is NOT to just know about him. Jesus' disciples spent a lot of time with Him, but it took a long time for them to really know Him. I'm reminded of the moment where Jesus sat with His closest friends and asked them a simple question: "Who do you say that I am?" (Luke 9:20) The rest of the world was missing it. And even when Peter *said* the right thing ("You're the chosen Messiah"), his *actions* immediately showed that even he had missed it. We can have a lot of knowledge about the Bible that puts God in our own self-constructed box of who we want Him to be. Jesus is far more than the things we know about Him. He wants us to experience Him and know Him through a personal relationship with Him.

1. How do you relate with Paul's statement, "I want to know Christ"?

2. **Read Mark 8:27-30.** Write out how you would answer Jesus' question.

3. How are you drawing near to Christ "to know Him better" in this current season of life?

Bonus:

• The word "Messiah" may be totally unfamiliar to you. Here's a video from the Bible Project on why [The Messiah](#) is such a big deal.



• As we reflect on Easter, read through the Gospel of Mark. (You can use this link to find a YouVersion plan)



Living in Resurrection Power - Week 1

Wednesday, April 3rd - Death

I grew up in a great family. Seriously, I don't think God could have placed me in a better home. Family dinners were filled with constant laughter, stories, and a steady stream of jokes (usually made at my dad's expense...he took it like a champ!). We learned to love each other and Christ well. We didn't walk through many crises as a family (at least not when we were old enough to remember) or have any big, relationship-threatening blow-outs. We scarcely had opportunities to walk through hard seasons together. I don't have many memories of us struggling as a family.

That changed when Dad's diagnosis came in. I won't forget the call. It changed everything. "Son, I've been getting some tests and the doctors are saying it's Parkinson's." Without words, our family made a conscious decision: We would walk through this hardship together. We'd suffer together. We'd have hard conversations about our experiences and relationships. We'd cry together and pray together. Because of this devastating and life changing news, I've never felt closer to my family than I do today.

We understand others best when we've shared in their suffering. In our verse for this week, Paul says that he wants to personally know Christ more; "to know the power of his resurrection." That sounds pretty great. Paul is looking at things in the world around him that seem hopeless and broken (which he had experienced a *lot* of) - injustice, suffering, sickness, lost relationships, the death of friends. We can look around and see many of the same things.

Where do you feel the power of sin and death around you? Maybe you feel a lack of purpose or meaning in your work or daily life. You may be trying to rebuild trust with someone close to you, but you don't see any progress. Perhaps you are trapped in a sinful habit that you've tried to kick, but can't quite shake on your own. The power that brought Jesus' resurrection is the same power that gives us hope in those circumstances.

That's what Paul is chasing after here, to know this power. So naturally, *yeah- we want that too!* But this verse shares that "knowing Christ" is more than just knowing Jesus in His resurrection. Paul says he can know Christ best by "participating in his suffering, becoming like him in his death". Check it out: "*I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection **and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death** and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead*" *Philippians 3:10.*

Resurrection power comes by sharing in Christ's sufferings. That bit doesn't sound as great as the resurrection part. We don't love to suffer. We also don't love to suffer *with other* people. Often, we're pretty bad at it, offering cliches and platitudes that make us feel better, but don't show true empathy or compassion. But if it's true that we understand others best when we share in their suffering, then there is something unique about sharing in the suffering of Christ.

We're going to take some time to soak in a few verses and sit with Jesus in His suffering. Below are three passages from Jesus' last day as He took our suffering upon Himself while He journeyed to the cross. (*If you have time, read and reflect through this whole passage of Luke.*)

Luke 22:42-44 | "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

Luke 23:33-34 | "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Luke 23:46 | "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

How can we suffer like that? How can we emulate Christ in the midst of our suffering by sitting with and understanding His? It may mean laying to death the worldly purpose or meaning you've sought after in life, be it finances, reputation, or accomplishments, and instead, finding purpose in participating in a kingdom-minded mission. In a relationship, it might mean dying to self, to ask for, or even offer forgiveness. This doesn't justify wrongdoing or permit it to continue, but forgiveness is the first step that clears the path towards reconciliation. It's the step that Jesus took to reconcile with us. Or maybe it's truly laying on the cross your own fleshly desires, surrendering the pride that keeps you from bringing your sinful habits into the light. To be free from sin and brokenness, we have to fully submit ourselves into the Father's hands, trusting in His power to bring about new life.

Here's one more passage for us to reflect on today: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit." 1 Peter 3:18

We suffer because our world is broken and distorted by sin. Jesus didn't *need* to suffer. He *chose* to. He took that suffering upon Himself *on our behalf*. Jesus' suffering paved a path for us to participate with Him in new life. It is His gift offered to us to cover our sins and make us righteous. And He invites us to partake with Him.

1. How do you participate in Christ's suffering? Which part of the Passion narrative do you relate with most?
2. How do you respond to suffering in your life? Do you shy away from suffering, or see it as an opportunity to emulate and better know Jesus?
3. Write down a quote (above) from Jesus that speaks to a way you are encountering suffering in your life. Post that note on your bathroom mirror, or keep it in your pocket as a reminder.

Living in Resurrection Power - Week 1

Day 3- Friday, April 5TH - Resurrection of Christ

I grew up going to church. A lot of biblical ideas and stories were familiar to me, but at the same time, my kid-brain made sense of those ideas in... well... lots of creative ways. I remember our church going through a series on Heaven. While Heaven is always a nice, comforting thought, "endless eternity" is a very tough concept for an eight year old to conceptualize. For a long time, a core aspect of my juvenile theology was that when Jesus said He was "going to prepare a place" for me, it certainly meant I would get my own mansion; complete with a ball pit, arcade, and endless supply of bacon. I'd wager that you came to similar conclusions if you grew up in the church (maybe there were ponies and princess dresses, but you know what I mean!) Heaven will be incredible. Don't get me wrong. I can't wait to see what Christ is preparing there. But if the "stuff" or "environment" of heaven is the only mindset we have about eternity, it will really affect the way we would read this week's passage.

"I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death **and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.**"
Philippians 3:10

It would be easy to assume that Paul was just hoping to experience life "on the other side" after he died. Almost like a retirements' saving, that all of his suffering was an investment that would pay off once he crossed the threshold of eternity. But if that's where we leave off, we're missing something very important .

Paul isn't just concerned with what happens to him *after* he dies- he has a strong desire to see changes *now*, to deepen his relationship with Christ *in this life*. The power of the resurrection is a present reality. But wait. How can you experience resurrection power when your body hasn't died? Coming out of the Easter season, there's something here worth reflecting on.

We already know that Jesus came to offer us eternal life. And that eternal life lasts forever. **But it starts right now, not when we die.** With the Holy Spirit in us, even though our physical bodies will still suffer and pass away, we experience God's eternal kingdom in our life right now. We can experience the power of His resurrection today. But how?

- The Power of the Resurrection Overcomes Sin, Suffering, and Death

Read Romans 6:5-11. When Christ was raised from the dead, He became the victor over sin and death. If we are with Christ, we're on the winning team over sin and death. His sacrifice restores our relationship with the Father. It made the way for us to be reconciled with the God who is Life. And that's not a relationship that starts when we leave this earth through the death of our physical body. It's a relationship we have *right now*.

- The Power of the Resurrection Produces Joy and Hope, regardless of circumstance.

Read Philippians 4:4-7. Because the resurrection made the way for us to be in relationship with God, then of course, when we come to know Jesus, everything changes. The areas of our life that felt void of hope or joy suddenly take on a new light. Our relationship with Him informs everything around us. As believers, we walk through every circumstance we face with the Holy Spirit as our company. We journey with the Spirit of life, hope, and joy dwelling in us. And regardless of our circumstance, He continues to pour into us and informs our hearts of who He is, no matter what is happening around us.

- The Power of the Resurrection Provides Assurance in a Future Hope of Eternal Life.

Read 1 Peter 1:2-5. Death is not our end. God is working to reconcile and restore the whole of creation to Himself, and that work ends when God creates the New Heaven and New Earth. The evil and brokenness in the world isn't all there will ever be. And perhaps, in seasons when you are face to face with those realities, the assurance of resurrection is the one thing that will give you strength to endure and find hope. In the face of a devastating diagnosis, the unexpected loss of a loved one, or the constant brutality we see on our news feeds, there is a faithful God who constantly reminds us of His promise: *This is not the way it's meant to be, and I am making it right.*

How do we know all of this? Because the tomb is empty. Because five hundred witnesses saw Jesus speaking and breathing after He was publically crucified. Because the eleven disciples endured torture and execution for holding fast to their message: Jesus is alive.

God is a God of resurrection. He has done it before, and He will do it again.

1. How do you envision "eternal life"? What did that mean to you when you first heard about it, and what does it mean to you now?

2. Where do you need to experience the power of Christ's resurrection in your life? Is it to overcome? To produce joy? Or to assure hope?

3. How has learning about Christ's **Life** and **Death** this week, informed your understanding of His **Resurrection**?

Living in Resurrection Power - Week 2

Monday, April 8 - Your THAT

Read Phil 3:10-14, focusing on verse 12.

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have I arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of me.”

We will never “arrive” until we get to Heaven, we will never perfectly attain the resurrection life that is available to us...but we can press on to “take hold of THAT for which Christ Jesus took hold of us.” What is your THAT...not his or hers, or theirs, but what is YOUR that?

- What are your tastes, your passions, your pursuits?
- What makes your eyes sparkle and your heart race?
- You have a calling, the thing God planted in your heart, something you were born to do.
- God intends your THAT to be useful for the kingdom. Your THAT has purpose beyond yourself.

The beauty of your THAT is that it is perfectly suited to your gifts and talents. Even if your THAT requires training or advanced education, it still fits you like a glove. Your THAT is personal. It’s something only you can do.

People frequently balk at this idea. Satan loves to capitalize on our hesitation. Satan loves to pitch the lie that we are replaceable, interchangeable... But this line of thinking could not be further from the truth!

Let me give you an example. The average student will have close to 100 teachers in their K-12 experience. Add in college, university, trade school or grad school, and obviously this number only gets higher. How many people could name ALL of their teachers ten years later? How about half of their teachers? Ok, try half of your high school teachers only? Struggling to make this list? Me too.

But consider this: how many of you can name one teacher who influenced you in a special way? What are some of your core memories of that teacher? Perhaps you even raise your children differently as a result of that teacher’s influence.

For me, that teacher was Mrs. Lopez. She taught foreign language and drama at my high school. She was a kind woman with a heart of gold and an Olympian work ethic. She demanded our best effort and drew out individual gifts and skills we didn’t even know we had. She took the time to know her students well. She was willing to step into the dark and messy places in our lives and spoke healing truth into emotional wounds most teachers didn’t notice. Far from replaceable, and not at all interchangeable, that

teacher saved my life and changed my future. She invested in me, altering the trajectory of my life in ways she will never know. This is the power of THAT.

Often, we have no idea what influence our THAT may have on another. We simply use our THAT to praise God and He grows His kingdom through our faithfulness.

1. To begin to understand what it means to “take hold of that for which Jesus took hold of us,” it's helpful to explore other Bible verses that speak to the concept of personal calling and purpose. Consider how the following verses speak to God’s vision for your THAT.

a. Jeremiah 29:11

b. Ephesians 2:10

c. Romans 8:28

2. Who is the most influential person in your life? How has his or her calling impacted you?

3. Our THAT can be as familiar as our favorite sweater or as elusive as a stranger on the street. How is your THAT coming into focus?

4. How are you being called to use your THAT? (It's ok if you don't know yet.)

Living in Resurrection Power - Week 2

Wednesday, April 10 - Discovering our purpose.

For some of us, our THAT seems as natural as breathing. We stumbled upon it or were introduced to it at an early age. We seem to simply grow into it. For others, our THAT is drawn out of a deep well of experience, covered in the barnacles of pain and heartbreak that life often brings. It challenges us, inspires us, and often stretches us in uncomfortable ways.

However we find it, discovering our THAT changes everything. Christ raised us to new life so we would grab ahold of our calling, our purpose, our mission. Not someone else's, our own. But how do we find it? And how do we know we have the right one?

Finding our "why" or our purpose involves:

- Seeking God earnestly through prayer, meditating on His Word, and listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Spend time in prayer asking God to reveal His purpose for your life. Pray for wisdom, clarity, and guidance in discerning His will.
- Dive deep into Scripture to understand God's character, His promises, and His desires for His people. The Bible serves as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.
- Pay attention to the things that bring you joy and fulfillment- they may be indicators of your unique calling. God often aligns our calling with our passions, talents, and spiritual gifts.
- Seek guidance from trusted mentors, pastors, or spiritual advisors who can provide insight and encouragement as you discern your calling.
- Most importantly, remain open to God's leading even if it doesn't align with your own plans or expectations. God's ways are higher than our ways, and His plans are always for our ultimate good (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Remember, discovering our calling is not a one-time event but an ongoing journey of surrendering to God's will and faithfully following Him wherever He leads. As we continue to "press on toward the goal for which Christ has taken hold of us," we can trust that He will equip and empower us to fulfill His purposes in our lives.

1. What has God placed in your heart that you just can't let go of? Something you are passionate about and relentlessly drawn to?

2. Oftentimes, God takes away things that were not meant for us, things that ultimately hinder our calling. Can you identify anything you thought, or perhaps even wanted, that was ultimately not for your good?

Beware! As with every journey, there are pitfalls and temptations that threaten to lead us away from our purpose. Blindly following someone else's idea of who we are supposed to be, rather than leaning into the wisdom of Scripture and Godly counsel, can potentially hinder our ability to become who God planned for us to be.

3. Which of these temporary setbacks have you experienced in pursuit of your THAT? Mark all that apply.

- **Loss of Authenticity:** Conforming to someone else's expectations or ideals, losing sight of your authentic self. This can lead to feelings of emptiness, dissatisfaction, and a lack of fulfillment in life.
- **Misalignment with God's Will:** Your journey and calling is unique, designed by God for His specific purposes. Following someone else's idea of who you should be can lead you away from God's intended path for your life.
- **Limited Growth and Potential:** Allowing others to dictate your identity and purpose can limit your own growth and potential. Following someone else's idea of who you should be may result in missed opportunities for personal strengthening and development. Embracing your own identity and calling allows you to fully explore and develop your God-given potential. God has equipped you with unique gifts, talents, and experiences, and He intends for you to use them fully for His glory.
- **Dependency on Others for Validation:** Relying solely on others' perceptions of you for validation can be dangerous. Your worth and identity should ultimately *be rooted in your relationship with God*, not in the opinions or expectations of others.

It's important to seek wise counsel and input from others, but ultimately, we must prayerfully discern God's will for our lives and follow His leading, even if it means stepping outside of others' expectations or comfort zones. As we trust in God's guidance and embrace our true identity in Christ, we can experience the abundant life He has promised us (John 10:10). Take a moment to identify three people in your circle who can offer you Godly counsel regarding finding your THAT or using your THAT to further God's kingdom.

● Name: _____ Phone #: _____

● Name: _____ Phone #: _____

● Name: _____ Phone #: _____

4. Now, reach out to these people this week and start the conversations about your THAT. It does no good to list them out and then never start the stretching and growing process of asking the questions and seeking the answers. Even if you already know your THAT, Godly counsel can bring further clarity and affirmation as you adventure forward. If you aren't sure who to put on this list- please reach out to our discipleship team- they would love to start these discussions with you: jake@impact.church or katef@impact.church.

Full disclosure? I took the scenic route through the wilderness to finally find my THAT. I stumbled upon it years before and dabbled with it through various seasons of my life, but I never really figured out what it all meant or how it fit into God's plan until many years later. Looking back, it is clear that God was placing street signs all along my path. Perhaps I wasn't listening. Perhaps I surrendered too much power to the opinions of others who should not have had such a strong voice. I know without doubt that I allowed fear to hold me back for a long time. But here is the beauty of God's character. He is patient with us. He is faithful to His plan for our future. He is certain of our purpose, even when we are not. But if we are willing to accept Christ's gift, surrendering our stubbornness and pride to His redemptive power... my friends, amazing things can happen.

- **Sense of Purpose and Fulfillment:** Understanding and pursuing your calling gives you a deep sense of purpose and fulfillment. You find meaning in your daily activities because they are aligned with your God-given gifts, passions, and values.
- **Alignment with God's Will:** Following your calling allows you to align your life with God's will. As you walk in obedience to His purposes, you experience His blessing, guidance, and presence in your life.
- **Impact on Others:** Obedience to your calling can have a positive impact on others. Whether it's through serving in ministry, pursuing a vocation that benefits others, or simply living out your faith in everyday life, you have the opportunity to be a light and an influence for good in the world.
- **Personal Growth and Development:** Striving to follow your calling often involves stepping out of your comfort zone and facing challenges. Through these experiences you grow and develop in character, faith, and resilience.
- **Fruitfulness and Productivity:** When you walk in your calling, you are positioned to bear fruit in your life. This fruit can manifest in various ways, such as: spiritual growth, strengthened relationships, achieved goals, and making a significant impact in your sphere of influence.
- **Joy and Peace:** There is a profound sense of joy and peace that comes from knowing you are walking in the path God has set before you. Even in the midst of difficulties and trials, you can have confidence that you are where God wants you to be, and that He is working all things together for your good.
- **Eternal Rewards:** Ultimately, following your calling is not just about the impact you make in this life, but also about storing up treasures in heaven. When you are faithful stewards of the talents, gifts, and opportunities God has given you, you can look forward to hearing Him say "well-done" and then receiving eternal rewards in the life to come (Matthew 25:21).

God has a specific plan and purpose for each of our lives. He has uniquely designed and equipped each of us for a specific purpose and calling. Our calling is intimately connected to our identity as children of God and intricately connected to His divine purposes and plans. Even in the midst of challenges and uncertainties, we can trust that God is working all things together for our good. It's time to step into who you are meant to be.

Select three of the bullet points above that resonate the most with you. Write out a prayer for each one. In each prayer include a praise to God for His faithfulness, a request or need in this area, and something that causes you to be grateful or thankful in this regard.

Point #1: _____

Praise:

Request:

Gratitude:

Point #2: _____

Praise:

Request:

Gratitude:

Point #3: _____

Praise:

Request:

Gratitude:

Bonus: Take this to one or more of the people you listed in Monday's devotional and share your thoughts and reflections with them so they can be a voice of encouragement and/or challenge as you wrestle through these ideas.

SOAR

Day 1: Read Eph. 2:10, Jer. 29:11, John 6:35, Rom. 12:2

SOAR: Jer. 29:11

Day 2: Read Acts 1:8, Phil. 1:6, John 15:5, Gal. 5:22-23

SOAR: John 15:5

Day 3: Read 1 Peter 4:10, Col. 3:23-24

SOAR: 1 Peter 4:10

Their eyes meet, locking in a dead stare. The hiker is frozen; time and space stand still. The mama bear is on her hind legs; her full height towering over the campsite. Her cub, unaware, munches on the upturned cooler of food between her feet. The camper begins to step backward, hands up in surrender, inching with each careful step in the direction of the trailhead where surely the promise of a full life awaits. There is only one goal; get to the car and the bear spray. Nothing else matters now. Slowly following the trail around a curve, he makes sure the mama bear hasn't advanced, before turning around and running at full speed toward safety. With burning legs and a considerable distance between him and the bears, he slows to a walk. Mentally he berates himself for forgetting to secure his food before going to bed. As his heart rate drops to a steady drumbeat, he starts to notice the birds chirping and how beautiful the trail is. Eventually, he stops to rest on a rock, thinking maybe he doesn't need to go to the parking lot after all. The threat has passed, and he will probably be fine without the bear spray. After all, the car is still a long way off.

WHY WE RUN

As believers we can so easily lose sight of our finish line too, can't we? We get tired of running, and we forget about the dangers that lie in wait. We might even forget why we started running in the first place. What is the goal of living a faithful, Christian life? Why do we do it? Friend, I do not want you to forget why you started running toward God, or why you *keep* pursuing Him. Don't get distracted. Don't look back. Come to the race prepared. Declare your 'why' and post it on your mirror, in your car, and by your bedside.

1. **Why** do you go to church, and read this devotional, and go to a Life Group, and pray, and do all the "good Christian" things? What is your goal? *Answer on your own before referencing the following passages: **Matthew 7:21-23; Jeremiah 7:23; 1 Peter 1:13-16***

Read Philippians 3:13-14 NIV

"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, I **press on** toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Paul is "straining" and "pressing on" toward a goal to win a prize. But, if we are already saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus (which we are), indwelt with the Holy Spirit (which we are), and living in resurrection power (which we are, or should be!), why the strain? Because we are *being made* new. We are throwing off the old self and running after the holy God of the universe, who *wants* to be with us. And that goal is something worth pursuing with everything we have.

WHY WE CHANGE

Corporate marketers spend millions of dollars studying us to figure out why we do what we do. What factors play into our decision making? What motivates us? How can they manipulate our behavior to meet *their* goal? I know, because I help them do it. I can make an algorithm that predicts which bear spray product you will likely purchase if you go camping in bear infested woods. I cannot, however, predict if you will leave said bear spray in the car; that's on you. Joking aside, one thing I've learned in over 15 years of studying consumer behavior is that we don't always behave logically or in the same way *consistently*. We deviate, defying expectations. Isn't this the Christian narrative? We defy the expectations of the culture around us. We go against the grain, chasing "eternal hope" and a "higher calling." Why?

2. Why do you **not** do the things you used to do, or what the world expects of you? *Answer on your own before referencing the following passages: **Ephesians 2:1-5; Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:1-4***

WHY SCRIPTURE GUIDES US HOME

I love that God isn't like a corporate marketer. He doesn't have to study us and manipulate us into doing what He wants. He *invites* us into His will and His plan through the Bible and through other believers. The goal isn't to chalk up as many "God points" as we can through work and good deeds before we die. The goal is to know Christ. To be united with Him in this life. To be a partner and co-laborer in Kingdom work done here on earth as it is in heaven. The ultimate goal; the finish line and its eternal riches and glory. Nearness to God now and forevermore.

3. Close out the day reading the following passages and noting how they help shape your "why": **Philippians 1:3-11; Philippians 1:20-26; Philippians 2:12-16**

"I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart." Jeremiah 24:7

God doesn't call us to behavior modification, He calls us to heart change. No longer are we who we once were; we are invited into new-creation living. Our preferences change, our motivations change, our desires and interests change. So what drives change in us? It is preferring the new thing more than the old. This change of heart is made possible by wanting God more than that old thing. We ended our Dark Horse series with a compelling teaching on following God for who He is, not what He can give us.

Read Philippians 3:13-14 NIV

"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, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Remember our camper from Monday, running from the bear? He had a worthy finish line in mind; reaching the car where his bear spray was unwittingly left behind. But, after running for a while and mentally beating himself up over his prior mistakes, he began to believe he was safe from the bear that posed a threat, and then got distracted by the beautiful scenery. He underestimated the value of the extra effort needed to reach the car, grab the bear spray, and return to the campsite.

WHAT WE FORGET

If we know the forward trajectory of our lives is "heavenward," we have to be willing to leave behind anything that is going to hold us back. Picture an airplane trying to lift off with a ton of rocks tied to the tail. Its not going to get off the ground, let alone reach cruising altitude. Paul goes even further to say we must "*forget* what is behind".

1. What does this phrase, "forgetting what is behind", evoke in you? What do you think it means?

Is Paul actually saying, forget that the past happened? Forget the people and places you have loved and lost? I don't think so. Rather, he means, "forget the hope you placed in the things of the past." Forget the empty desires these things once filled, and the worship and devotion you attributed to them. In Genesis 19, Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt after looking back at the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. She directly disobeyed an order from God not to look back, so *why* did she look back? Commentators believe she was looking back longingly, hesitating to believe and follow God wholeheartedly. In Numbers 11, God was angry with His people when they complained in the wilderness.

They longed for the delicious food of Egypt, not recognizing the goodness of the daily bread God was faithfully providing.

2. What do you need to **forget** to pursue God fully? Are they hang-ups or hurts? Hopes or dreams?

3. How is God **better** than all of these things?

We are not only called to forget the things we put our hope in during our pre-Christian lives, but also the good works we have done in the name of Christianity. Paul declares the religious things he used to prop himself up with as rubbish. They are of no consequence compared to "knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

Read Philippians 3:1-9

4. How much of your motivation to serve and follow God is driven by a desire to be recognized by others inside or outside of the church?

5. How can adjusting your perspective on the "goal," your "why" from Monday, change how your faith overflows into good, spiritual works that flow from a correct heart posture?

WHAT WE REMEMBER

There are times when remembering actually supports our “heavenward” trajectory. When we remember the position we came from, and what we have been given in Christ Jesus, it fuels us onward and upward.

Read Ephesians 2:11-13 NIV

“Therefore, **remember** that...you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. **But now** in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

6. Reflect on the work God has **already** done in you. What do you need to remember?

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” Colossians 3:23-24

I love the humble leadership Paul shows in Philippians 3. Look at this:

The Goal: "I want to know Christ...to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings...attaining to the resurrection from the dead." (v.10) "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior...who...will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (v.20-21)

Status: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal...Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it." (v.12-13)

Progress: "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me..straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal..." (v.12-14)

Invitation: "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." (v.17)

Paul is saying, "Hey, I know where the finish line is. I haven't arrived there yet, but I am actively moving in that direction. Won't you join me on the journey? And look, there are others who are already on the path with me. Come along and follow our lead. We'll help you get home."

WHERE WE FIND ENCOURAGEMENT

Look back at our camper's story from Monday. How would you rewrite it if he had a friend with him on the trip? Let's say between the two of them, they still forgot the bear spray in the car and left the food unsecured. The bears arrive. What happens during the escape when one gets tired, distracted, or gives up? The other is there to pull him up off the rock, remind him where they're headed, and walk beside him the rest of the way. This is the Christian journey. None of us have arrived; we fall, someone helps us up, we journey together, we encourage, we follow examples, and lead by example.

1. How has looking at the way other Christians live **encouraged** you in your faith? Name and describe someone who influences you positively toward your heavenly call.

2. When has looking at the way other Christians live **discouraged** you in your faith? Name and describe a time when a Christian's attitude or behavior made you frustrated in your faith.

Like Paul, we are all still "straining toward" the goal, not yet arrived. Our journey, as believers, follows all sorts of ups and downs, twists and turns. Consider whether in your current season and community, you are looking to others as a model, or if you are the one who needs to be a model for others. Do not get distracted or discouraged by the shortcomings of the Christians around you. Maybe it is your turn to lift them back up again.

WHERE WE FIND GROWTH

We are going to end by looking at three exhortations from Hebrews 10.

Read Hebrews 10:1-25 (we will dig in starting at verse 22.)

"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings..." (v.22)

3. Consider verse 22. What is your next step of faith - drawing nearer to God, growing in sincerity of heart, or stepping out in full assurance of God's promises? Who comes to mind as someone who can help you grow in this area? (Maybe one of the people on your list from last week?)

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." (v.23)

4. Consider verse 23. Where do you struggle in your faith - looking back or holding onto your pre-Christian life, forgetting the goal and where you put your hope, or trusting in God to be faithful to fulfill His promises? Why is this the most challenging for you?

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together...but encouraging one another...” (v.24-25)

5. You have so much to offer others. Consider verses 24-25. Ask God for wisdom in how you can encourage someone in your life on their faith journey. Write down an idea, big or small.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1-2

SOAR

Monday:

Read Philippians 1:1-2:11

SOAR Philippians 1:6

“Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Wednesday:

Read Philippians 2:12-3:14

SOAR Philippians 3:2-3

“Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.”

Friday:

Read Philippians 3:15-4:23

SOAR Philippians 4:9

“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

