



MAY 2, 2021 | PASTOR PETER YI

## “Keep On Keeping On” (Philippians 3:12-21)

**<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.**

**<sup>15</sup> All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us live up to what we have already attained.**

**<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**

What is the purpose of the Christian life? If a close non-Christian friend of yours asked you that question, how would you answer? Or what if a young, brand new Christian asked you what the purpose of the Christian life is, how would you answer her? Of course, another way to ask that question is to simply ask, what is the purpose of life? For the Christian and for the non-Christian, they are the same question, are they not? Whether we call it the Christian life or just life, they are one in the same. These questions lead to other related questions such as, for what purpose was I created? Where do I find the deepest meaning?

There are different ways to answer these questions. Let's go back again to that friend who's asking you the question of purpose. How would you answer? Some might say, well, the purpose of life is to be happy. That's the ultimate purpose. Everything I do ultimately serves my happiness.

Others might answer that the purpose of life is to help others, especially those in need. This is where we find people who live for a cause. It may be a political cause, or a humanitarian cause or an environmental cause.

Still others may answer the question of purpose through the lens of productivity. I find my purpose in my work, in earning money, and in my accomplishments. Many people, as we know, would answer the question in this way.

Then you have another group that answers the question of purpose in seeking adventure, in experiencing new experiences. They work just enough to live the next adventure, to go to the next destination. I think if I wasn't a Christian or a pastor, I'd probably be in this category.

However, for the Christian, specifically, what's our purpose? Is it to tell others about Jesus? Evangelism, being a witness. Is that the ultimate purpose? It's definitely up there, but is it the ultimate purpose?



A Christian might say, no, it's to build God's kingdom down to earth, or to bring God's heavenly kingdom and all its values and make it a reality here on earth. So, we exist to eliminate poverty and sickness and homelessness and so on. That too is a lofty goal, but is it the ultimate purpose?

Still some Christians might say, ah hah, I know the answer, it's to build the church. The church is the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, so what could be more important than to build his church. That's what our ultimate purpose must be or, maybe this is the answer. Our ultimate purpose in this life is to get to the next life. Obtaining eternal life is the highest purpose. Everything else must be subordinate to this purpose because you might achieve all the other things, but if you fail in this thing, then you've lost everything. Hmm...it's hard to argue with this answer.

So, which is it? What's the right answer to the question? Before we answer that question and we will in just a moment, I want to emphasize to you that it is an important question. The question of ultimate purpose or primary purpose or what Jonathan Edwards calls "the chief end," is important because once we know the chief end, all other things will begin to fall into their rightful place, but if we miss the chief end and live our lives pursuing the lesser ends, then we'll be constantly living our lives missing the ultimate purpose. We'll come to the end of our lives and we just might conclude that we missed the mark. So, what is the chief end, the ultimate purpose? **It's Knowing God.** It's to know God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; that is the ultimate purpose of our lives and that's for the Christian and for the non-Christian. For every human being on the planet, this is our true purpose. Every other purpose falls subordinate to this purpose.

Now, today's passage supports this thesis, but are there other places in Scripture that support this? Well, let's begin with God. Somewhere in your life statement, your life purpose, if you are a Christian, must include the Word of God. Who is the most important being in the universe? Surely, it's not some super athlete or some mega business tycoon or some great political figure or the king or queen of social media. Surely, they can't be the most important being in the universe. As well, the planet earth can't be the most important thing in the universe. Sure, it's the only dwelling place for humans. But the reason we care for the planet at all is because it serves humans. So, the earth has to be subordinate to the humans that inhabit it, doesn't it?

God is the most important being and thus the ultimate purpose for every person must include something about God.

Then related to that, we should look to discover what God has determined our purpose to be. If God is our creator, and he certainly is, then isn't it fitting that God is the one that decides what the purpose of his creation should be? So, what is the purpose of his creation, which of course includes us human beings? Listen to Psalm 19:

**Psa. 19:1** The heavens declare the glory of God;  
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.  
2 Day after day they pour forth speech;  
night after night they reveal knowledge.  
3 They have no speech, they use no words;  
no sound is heard from them.  
4 Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,  
their words to the ends of the world.  
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.  
5 It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,  
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.  
6 It rises at one end of the heavens  
and makes its circuit to the other;  
nothing is deprived of its warmth.



What is the purpose of the creation? To bring glory, honor, fame, recognition, and magnification to the Creator!

What about Isaiah 42:8?

<sup>8</sup> "I am the LORD; that is my name!  
I will not yield my glory to another  
or my praise to idols.

And Isaiah 48:11

<sup>11</sup> For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this.  
How can I let myself be defamed?  
I will not yield my glory to another.

For an even more explicit answer listen to Isaiah 43:7

<sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made.

So, just from those passages, what is the purpose of every individual? It's to bring glory to God. It's to recognize God as the only true God. It's to praise Him and not idols. It's to never to dare give the glory that should only go to God to another. It's to be that for which God created us, and that's to Glorify Him! That's why you exist -- to bring God glory.

When we go to the New Testament, I'll share three passages, all from the mouth of Jesus. First is Matthew 6:33 where he says,

<sup>33</sup> But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well

Here's the second passage. In answering the question, which is the greatest commandment, which is asking, what is the most important thing to do, Jesus answers like this,

**(Matthew 22:37)** Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment.

Surely the religious leaders who asked the question must have expected one of the Ten Commandments, right? And of the Ten, surely it had to be from the first tablet which was about our relationship to God, not the second tablet which was about our relationships with people. But of the four on the first tablet, which one? Which was the most important commandment? To have no other gods? To make no idols? To never to take God's name in vain? Or was it to keep the sabbath day holy? If I had to choose, it'd be the first one.

I'm sure that's what they were expecting. But Jesus doesn't refer to the Decalogue at all. He goes beyond it to Deuteronomy 6:5. As the Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, this was the command that God gave them.

<sup>4</sup> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.

Loving God with our whole being—heart, soul and strength—that's the greatest commandment that sums up all the other commandments. Every other commandment falls under this commandment.



What does loving God imply? It implies a relationship with him, does it not? Love always implies a relationship. We don't love things, we love beings, we love persons, beings with personhood.

Here's one final passage that you all know very well: John 17:3. Remember the upper room discourse that takes up much of the latter part of the John's gospel? It begins in chapter 13 with the foot washing and then Jesus gives his disciples several lengthy discourses and it concludes with his high priestly prayer in chapter 17 and here's what he says in that prayer:

<sup>3</sup> Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

According to Jesus what is eternal life? Is it merely living forever? Is it going to heaven rather than hell? Here's what it is. It's knowing the only true God and his Son Jesus Christ. That's what's going to be the best part of eternal life. That's what eternal life is!

Okay, so back to the question. What is your ultimate purpose? What is your chief end? Why were you created? From where will you find your greatest fulfillment? It's in knowing God.

Let's now look at today's passage.

In case we've forgotten, a couple verses earlier, Paul said,

<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

He puts aside his Jewish pedigree. He even puts aside all the accomplishments that he did as an apostle. All of them are garbage compared to knowing Jesus.

**Now the first thing that Paul mentions in this passage is that this ultimate purpose of knowing Christ will never be fully achieved in this life.** Listen to how he says it:

**(Philippians 3:12)** 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. <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.

There are some important things that Paul says in these verses. He describes knowing Christ in three ways. Something to be obtained. A goal to arrive at. And something to take hold of. What do those three things mean? Let's look at each of them. First something to be obtained. One commentator describes it like this, "to enter into a close relationship, to receive, to make something one's own, to apprehend or comprehend." Yes, of course, if we are Christians, we already have Christ, but knowledge of Him, relationship with Him is ongoing; apprehension and comprehension of Christ is always building, just as it is with any other relationship.

What about a goal to arrive at? The goal is complete knowledge of Christ or perfection in my relationship with Him. Due to our sin, we will never reach that goal on this side of heaven, but we will reach that goal after we die when we will see him as he is, as it says in 1 John and Paul elsewhere says,

**(1 Corinthians 13:12)** For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.



This is the goal, to fully know the Lord Jesus Christ -- to achieve perfection in our relationship with him.

Then Paul says that knowledge of Christ is something to press on to take hold of. It means to overtake. Now, I want to spend a little bit more time on this one because Paul uses this phrase not only to describe what he's doing, but also what has been done to him. He presses on to take hold in the same manner in which Christ Jesus took hold of him. When Paul was on the Damascus road, with fire in his eyes, chasing down Christians to persecute them, his life was turned upside down when he encountered the living Christ. Now, you know the story, so let me ask you some questions? Was Paul on a mission to search out the Saviour? Was his primary goal to know Christ? No, he was so blinded in his zeal, in his cause, in his religion, in his sin, that it took a supernatural encounter with the living Christ. As Paul was chasing Christians, Christ was chasing Paul. Jesus apprehended him, stopped him dead in his tracks and saved him right there on the spot. It was Jesus who first took a hold of him.

This is true with every conversion. It's not that we took hold of Jesus, so in return he takes hold of us. In every situation it's Jesus who first takes hold of us. Only then do we take hold of him. This is how you were saved. Christ Jesus took hold of you. He changed your heart. He revealed to you your sin. He opened your ears to the Gospel. He gave you the gift of repentance. He gave you the faith you required to put your trust in him. He provided you with his atoning sacrifice. He did everything. You contributed nothing, except your sin. This is the manner in which Christ took hold of you. How then could we not take hold of him? This is why Paul wants to know Christ, and this is the reason why we want to know him, by loving him and cherishing him and serving him and living for him and suffering for him and even dying for him.

**So, how do we go about reaching this goal?** Two things Paul mentions. First forget what is behind, what's in the past. The verb to forget implies a continual act of forgetting. That means we never linger in the past. We don't get bogged down about our past lives. However good or bad our lives were before we became Christians, we don't linger there; nor do we live in the afterglow of past accomplishments which we did after we became Christians. As Paul said, he considers them garbage compared to what's ahead.

Unfortunately, many Christians can get stuck in these two areas of their past—their non-Christian past and their Christian past. A person might look back at their life of sin with some nostalgia, thinking of that time as the good ole days. To think of the past in that way is foolish, because every aspect of that part of our lives was lived in rebellion against God. But perhaps for Christians, we can get stuck in thinking too much about our Christian past, especially as we get older. You may look back and lament how passionate you used to be, how much zeal you had, how active you were in the church, how much you did for God, but that doesn't really have any value as it relates to knowing Christ. It's today and tomorrow that's really important. It's what lies ahead that really matters. Unless we part with the past, we cannot fully go after the future. Until we let go of all that has happened in the past, both good and bad, both Christian and non-Christian, we cannot completely move forward. So, that's the first thing we must do.

In addition to forgetting the past, we have to strain toward what's ahead. The picture of a runner sticking out his chest to be the first to touch the tape at the finish line is the image we should have. We don't look over our shoulder to see who's coming up behind us. Nor do we coast thinking that we've all but won the race. As they say in sports, "in ain't over till it's over."

Just recently over one of the many zoom calls I had, someone asked me, "Peter, how can I pray for you?" Surprising even myself, I replied, "That I would finish well." Why did I answer that way? Maybe because of my age. I'm 52 years old now. Nowhere near retirement, but getting closer every day. Maybe because of the recent moral failures of some of our most admired Christian leaders. Maybe because I want to be found faithful by my Saviour. It's probably for all those reasons.



It's sad that many prominent leaders were so close to the finish line and stumbled right near the end with sexual sin, with theological compromise, with mishandling of money. It can be anything. I want to finish well, don't you? Whether you're 20 years old or 60 years old, this is the attitude you should have. Stretch out your chest, and with every last bit of energy, by the grace of God, finish strong.

There's something else that Paul mentions, which is found in the next verse. He continues the image of a runner in a race and says, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (14). What is the prize for which Paul is running? Is it to get as many jewels in his heavenly crown? Is it to win as many souls as possible? Is it to establish and build as many churches as he can? All of these incredibly great prizes pale in comparison to THE prize, which is Christ.

Is that true for you? Is Jesus the prize for which you are running? If he isn't, then as we mentioned at the beginning, we'll hit all outer circles, while missing the bullseye.

How certain is Paul of this? So much so that he says,

**(Philippians 3:15)** All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Paul says, there's no other way. He's so convinced that this is true that he says, All of us should have this perspective and if you don't, then sooner or later, God will make this purpose clear to you. Many people unfortunately, find out very late, near death, that they had lived their lives for lesser purposes and not for the ultimate purpose. Don't be that person. Since you now know, readjust your life to know Christ, to make Him your holy ambition, your sacred pursuit, and your eternal prize.

And then Paul says as we end this chapter, 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. Let me just quickly point out a couple things. First our pursuit of Christ is something we do together. Paul tells us, brothers and sisters, join together in following my example. This made me think of some of the psalms that are called psalms of ascent. These were the psalms that were sung by God's people as they trekked up to Jerusalem, to mount Zion. Picture with me the scene. God's people are scattered throughout the land of Israel, according to the 12 tribes. But several times a year, especially at Passover, every believer makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to God's holy temple to offer sacrifices and to worship Him. You can imagine that as the journey begins the roads are still quite sparse with travelers, but with every mile, the density of people increases, and when they are just a few miles from the city, the roads are packed with people making their way to the city of God. And as they ascend the hill up to the temple, they begin to sing choruses of worship and praise. They sing these songs as families, and as a confessing community. Yes, they live their own lives, but they also pursued the Lord together. That's why all of us should be starving for the gathering together of our faith community, so that together, we may go after the Lord.

Finally, Paul tells us how to do it. Listen to verse 20-21:

<sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

First, know your destination. You're a citizen of heaven. Earth is merely a pitstop, a layover. Your final destination is heaven.



Second, long for the return of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. This too reminds us that our time here is but a fraction of eternity. Jesus will return and he will judge the world and take his people home.

Third, live knowing that Jesus is Lord. Remember what Paul wrote in chapter 2? That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Fourth, he says, remember that this earthly body is not the end of the story. When Jesus returns, in the twinkling of an eye we will change, we will be transformed.

All of these things are saying that the best is yet to come. So, live now, in light of the absolute certainty of what is to come. Jesus, the object of our knowledge, the desire of our hearts, the focus of our affections, he will return to claim his bride. So, what do we do? Just as a bride awaits her lover, so too, we await our groom, with longing affection.

What is your purpose? What is the purpose of the Christian life? What is the chief end of your life? It's to know Christ.

Let's pray.