

Pressing on

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning to you. Good to be with you again. This is the second Sunday of 2017. And it was good to see some of you last week when I came along, and now it's good to see you.

If you weren't here last week, let me say Happy New Year to you. And may it be a God-filled blessed year for you, and may you do lots for the Lord Jesus Christ because actually only what you do for him lasts.

The rest is all wood, hay, and stubble. So let's be busy in the real thing this year. I want to share with you today a message that comes to you from the verses that were read, the verses that were read to you from Philippians, Philippians chapter 3, verses 10 to 14.

And what I'm sharing about is simply a message pretty close to my heart, because in many ways these verses are like my life motto, you might say.

My life motto verses. Years ago, when I started out in the ministry, which is now, I was totaling up over 50 years ago, in my first church, which was in Edenvale, in then the Transvaal, now Gauteng, Edenvale, I remember standing at the door of the church.

[1 : 28] After you preached, the norm was at that time to go to the door of the church and stand there and shake the people's hands as they left the church. And I would ask people, how are you?

And people would then tell me. Some would say it in a word, some would say it in a sentence, and some would go on for quite a while. And I'd have to take their hand and help them out the church, because there were lots of people behind them.

And I couldn't stand for five minutes talking to one person. But that told me, people want to tell you how they are. But not many people are really interested in how you are.

So I thought, well, what do I say to people? And so over all the years, if you ask me, how are you? I will tell you. I will tell you I'm pressing on.

Even now, as I'm a gray-headed older man in years, gone through a couple of things, surgery and so on and so forth, if you ask me, I will tell you, pressing on.

[2 : 39] Now that's what these verses are about. And that's what we need to be doing for the new year, for another year that God has given us, for 2017 that is reaching, switching out before us.

We're looking out over a new year. I'm saying to you, what we need to do is to say, I'm pressing on. So what we got here are some words where the Apostle Paul is writing, and he's writing to the church in Philippi.

And he's saying to them, press on. What I'm doing is pressing on. He uses four main words that are not in the text. But listen to them.

The first word is dissatisfaction. The second word is obliteration. The third word is concentration. And the last word is anticipation. These words are here in this text. The first being dissatisfaction. And he says, I haven't yet attained.

[3 : 52] Then the word obliteration. He says, forgetting the things that are behind. And then concentration. One thing I do is press on.

And the last word is anticipation. Pressing towards the mark. All right, the first word is dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction.

Look at verse 10 if you've got your Bible open. Verse 10's got it there where the Apostle simply says, that I may know him.

That I may know him. The power of his resurrection. The fellowship of his sufferings. Being made conformable to his death. Dissatisfaction.

What is he dissatisfied about? And you and I need to come to another new year. And we need to also look at our own hearts and lives.

[4 : 48] And see if we are actually satisfied or dissatisfied with our lives. Well, the Apostle Paul was not happy with his level of commitment.

He wasn't really happy with his level of commitment. He said, I want to know Christ better. And if you have any thought for the new year.

If you have any resolution for the new year. If you have any desire for the days in which you're living. It should be this. That I may know him better.

Firstly, do you know him? Many people think they know him. Many people hope they know him. Many people say, well, we'll certainly know when we get there.

If we know him or not. No, the Bible makes it perfectly clear. That you can know him. And you can know him personally.

[5 : 49] Finally. And you can know him certainly. Finally. Definitely. And you can know him so much. That you know for certain that if you died tonight, you could go to heaven.

That's why the Bible says, these things are written. That he may know. That you have eternal life. I love that. That he may know. It's not a maybe. But it is a certainty.

Do you know him? If you know him, how well do you know him? Do you need to get to know him better? I think we all need to get to know him better.

Amen? Amen? Amen. Every one of us should be praying this prayer of the Apostle Paul. Now the next thing is, he's not happy with the power that he's got.

He's wanting more power. He wants more power, not just in life and in the world and in the business. He's wanting more spiritual power.

[6 : 51] That's what he's wanting. He's not happy with the level of power that he has. He talks about the power of the resurrection. Have you ever thought of the power of the resurrection?

Can you not go back in your mind to the time when Jesus walked on this earth? And Jesus did many wonderful things. And Jesus eventually knew he had to go to the cross.

And there he went to the cross. And there they put him on the cross and he died. And when he died, the whole of hell rejoiced.

The devil and his demons and his angels rejoiced. And said, well now, there it is. The Son of God has been silenced.

He's dead. He's been laid in a tomb. And the whole of hell went mad for a few hours as they rejoiced. And threw a party, the biggest party you've ever had.

[7 : 53] And until on the third day, all of a sudden, everything went quiet. As they saw an amazing sight before their eyes.

Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lamb of God, who had been dead and buried and in a tomb, all of a sudden came back to life. And he came out of the tomb.

And the whole of hell stood silent. And Satan knew what that meant. He knew that power that had been used to bring Jesus out of the grave.

The resurrection was the greatest power ever known to any man. Greater than any legal person. Greater than any political man on the face of this earth.

Is the power that unleashed in that grave that day. And that Jesus stood up and was back on earth again. You see, there's power in the resurrection.

[8 : 54] There's power, great power in the resurrection. There is no greater power than to be able to bring somebody back from the dead. And of course, you can't do that.

No man can do that. No matter what he can do. No matter what he can create. No matter how smart he is. You can even buy sunglasses now with a little camera in it.

And it's sitting there. And they say that when you wear those glasses, you don't have to miss anything. You just simply do that. And it takes pictures of whatever you're looking at. Amazing, isn't it?

You can buy it now. It's on special if you want to. All right? There you go. But it's amazing what man can do. But he cannot recreate life. He cannot bring somebody from the dead.

That power was God's power. And Apostle Paul is saying here, I want something of that power. I want to have spiritual power. And the power is available, friend.

[9 : 53] The power is not of you. The power is not of me. The power is of God. And it is the Holy Spirit of God. And he says, I'm dissatisfied with my power.

I want more of the power of the resurrection in my life. You know, even when Frankie prayed the prayer, Enid prayed the prayer one night. You know what happened in their lives?

In that moment, the power of God came into their lives. Giving them the power that was unleashed at the resurrection. The same power to change him.

I said to him yesterday, I said, you know, your view on Israel long ago was very different than it was. What changes a man? What on earth changes a person from darkness to light?

What changed? The power of God. And that's why churches have to see souls saved. That's why if you don't in your life and in your church life see people come to Christ and see their lives revolutionized, we become complacent.

[10:59] And we go from one year into the next year and we float along and the church is just a place where we come to and we go home. We come to and we go home. No, we want to see the power of the resurrection in the lives of the people.

People changing us, making us what we ought to be. Now, he's not also happy with the fellowship. He's not happy with his fellowship in Christ.

He wants greater intimacy. He wants to get into what Christ went through for him. And that's what he talks about in Colossians 1.24. It talks about you and I making up the sufferings of Christ.

Now, to be a Christian in this world, there needs to be some suffering. There needs to be some joking, some ridiculing. There needs to be some people that might point fingers at us.

We've got to be willing for that. We've got to be willing to suffer for Christ. To enter into some of the sufferings that he went through for us.

[12:01] You and I need to do the same. And he wasn't happy with his relationship. He says, I hold. I hold and am held.

Isn't that wonderful? Did you see that phrase there? In that verse 10? Where he says, in verse 10, I've been held.

Somewhere there it is. I know that. But anyway, it's there that he talks about being held. Being held by Christ. Now, the point is that I hold Jesus' hand.

I hold his hand, but he holds mine. Now, that's called the Roman handshake. And it's about like that. The Roman handshake. You hold and am held.

Now, I hold Christ's hand. But he also reaches down and holds my hand. I don't know whether you've ever read that. I need to show you that. And if you want to look it up, it's in Isaiah 41.

[13:05] Isaiah 41. And Isaiah teaches us here that God holds our hand and we must hold his hand.

Isaiah 41 and verse 13. Verse 10, first of all. So do not fear. Listen to the word.

So do not fear. I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. And I will help you.

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. My righteous right hand. See that? Now, look at verse 13 in that chapter.

For I am the Lord your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear.

[14:01] I will help you. Now, the one verse says, God will take us by the right hand. The next one says, We must take him with the right hand.

And I want to say to you, if you're ever in a difficult situation, if you're ever in a problem area in your life and you don't know what to do, you don't know where to turn, this is what you must do.

Put up your hand. Put up, even if it feels foolish, even if you feel embarrassed, even if you're in company and you don't know what to do, put up your hand.

And put it up and say, Lord, I'm holding your hand. And you said you would hold my hand. Do you know what? It works. Try it sometime.

Just try it. And as you say to him, Lord, I'm going to take your hand, he will reach down and take yours. He said he would. He said he would. And that's what the apostle is talking.

[15:02] He says, I'm dissatisfied with my life. I want my life to be better, to be more in tune with this God. I want to walk with him. I want to walk by holding his hand.

Dissatisfaction. But then quickly, obliteration. Look at verse 13. He says, One thing I do. See that? One thing I do.

What is it? Forgetting that which is behind. Forgetting that which is behind. We must not always look behind. We're good at looking behind.

We're good at raising the past. We're good at bringing things up from the past. And the apostle is saying here, forget what is behind.

And look to what is in front of you. Look forward. If you've failed in the past, leave it behind you. If you've messed up in things in the past, well, put it behind you.

[16:08] Forget it. Move on into the future. Forgetting what is behind. Forgetting the goals of last year. Forgetting the achievements of last year.

Not gloating over them. Because, you see, we're classic. Saying, you know what I did? What did you do? Well, you're going to talk about what you did last year, what you did last week, what you did yesterday, how you achieved this and achieved that, and how you managed to do this and do that.

And we'd love to do that. We'd love to do that. You know, we are just being, let me tell you, you know, and it all comes out. And we've got to forget about the past. We've got to leave it behind us because what happens is this.

We do this. We lean on our laurels. That's what we do. We're classic at leaning on our laurels.

How's your church going? Oh, well, you know, the days long ago, it used to be this and it used to be that.

No, no. What's happening now? It's important. You see, it's not, don't lean on past achievements. Don't lean back on all the accomplishments of the past.

[17:18] Leave it behind you. This is what he's saying. This one thing I do, forgetting what is behind. You see, we classic at counting our achievements. We like to count our successes.

We like to say how well we've done in the past. We need to turn our back on them. This is obliteration. Oh, just take it out of your memory.

Forget about it. Turn your back on them. We need to count all things but loss. All things like they are done in order that I may win Christ and win his approval and win his blessing and win his power and his strength.

Obliteration. Obliteration. He says, I'm dissatisfied. I'm prepared to obliterate from my mind and my heart what I've done in the past. And then there's concentration.

Concentration. And here he talks about in verse 13, the last part of verse 13. He says, straining or pressing, straining or reaching toward the future.

[18:33] Pressing on. Going ahead. The word here for straining now. It's the word that an athlete knows all about. You've watched them run races in the Olympics.

You've watched them at different athletics meetings, how they run. And I love watching them run races. I often watch, you know, the athletes and the various athletic meetings around the world. It's interesting to watch how amazingly they can run and win a race. Now, here's the word that's used. As an athlete is running. That as they are running, they're going for the tape.

Their arms are going. And this is the word used here. It's as it were, they are clutching at the air. They are clutching to bring themselves along faster in order that they might win the race and reach the tape first.

And this is what it meant here when he says, I'm straining. I am straining. And then we've got to prepare for a race because we're in a race.

[19:41] We've got to prepare for a race. There's got to be a training program. There's got to be all this going on so we can win the race. You see, as a Christian, you're in the greatest race in all time.

You're in the best race of all. And the race is to go ahead for Christ, to win for Christ, to get to the end, to be able to say, I have fought a good fight.

I have finished the race. And you're finished achieving things. You're finished winning people to Christ. We need to accept the fact we're in a race.

We're in a race, not a picnic. We're in a race, folks. We're in a race this year of 2017. It's not just a walk in a park. We're in a race.

And we know the time is coming when it's going to be all up. Either you're going to die and it's too late. Or otherwise the shout's going to come, Christ is going to return, and we're going to go.

[20:48] So we need to realize we're in a race. And the race is this, that we must run the race with patience, and we must run the race, and we must be effective as we run the race, and we must be bringing people along with us as we run the race.

Now we know many times there's hurdles in the way. We know many times that there's all sorts that would keep us back and hold us down. So we've got to keep our eyes on the author and finisher of our faith.

We've got to keep our eyes on the end of the race. We've got to keep our eyes on the finishing line. And our prayer's got to be, Lord, keep me faithful, keep me focused, and keep me going for the tape.

Concentration. That's what it is. Are you concentrated as a Christian? Are you focused on what you do for God in this world?

Because as we heard this morning, as Alan led us, everything's going to be left behind. The psalmist said that in Psalm 49. Everything except the people you went to Christ.

[22 : 00] You need to take your children with you. Your children in your own family need to go with you when you go. The people you've won to Jesus will go with you.

The rest will be left behind. We need to concentrate. And then lastly, anticipation. So there is dissatisfaction, obliteration, concentration, and now anticipation.

Paul says, I press towards the mark. See that? I press towards the mark. The word press here means intense endeavor.

It's used for a hunter. A hunter has gone out to hunt his prey. And the word here is this hunter is pursuing the prey.

He wants to, he wants this buck and he pursues it. He pursues it and pursues it until he gets it. That's intense endeavor.

[23 : 03] And that's what the apostle is saying here. You and I must this year press on with intense endeavor. With anticipation. Not giving up.

Not letting up. But striving. Striving for the tape. Seeing the fact that we're running a race and there's the finishing line. We're pressing on towards the tape.

And we're reaching for the prize, you see. We're reaching for the prize. See, there is a reward involved in the Christian life.

There is a reward. And that reward, it says here, that reward is a high calling. It's a high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

You see, you see the calling that's on a Christian's life. It's not something just to ignore. When you come to Christ and you receive him into your life, there's a call on your life.

[24 : 07] Whether you're a minister or whether you're a pew sitter or whether you're a Sunday school teacher or whether you're a youth worker or whether you're just working in an office. Listen to me.

There's a call. There's a call on your life. And God expects you to be of use to him in that position that you're in. And there's a reward because you've got a high calling.

And your calling is not from some government official. Your calling is not from the president of South Africa. Your calling is higher than that.

It's from the king of all kings. The lord of all lords. There's a calling is on your life. And there's a reward for that high calling. What are the rewards?

Well, a new body awaits you. You know when it's all over and we're caught up? You're going to receive a new body. It awaits you.

[25 : 05] Like they say today, you'll get an upgrade. Amen? That will be nice. Some people are waiting for it. Some people are hoping for it sooner than later. But that's true.

That's a reward. A reward is a new home. A new home. And it'll be ready for you. It'll be suited to your needs. You know why you haven't gone yet?

Because your mansion's not ready. He's still working on it. But you've got something to look forward to. And then of course there's a new set of activities for you waiting.

Somebody said to me this week, but what are we going to do there? You know, everybody thinks this is going to be music. You know, we're just going to listen to this beautiful piano playing. And we're going to sing hymns and praises.

And that's all we're going to do for 24 hours a day. Well, it's not even going to be a day, eh? I mean, your mind struggles to imagine. But I want to tell you, there are going to be some things that will keep you so occupied.

[26 : 06] Your every faculty, your every member of your being will be filled to total capacity. You'll be fulfilled. There'll be tremendous activities.

And that's something of the reward that we are waiting for. And we should aim. We should aim, all of us, this year, run the race.

And run the race and be found running the last lap flat out. And therefore, reach the tape. Win the race.

And hear the words. Hear the words. Well done. Good and faithful servant. Enter in to what has been prepared for you.

So what must you do? Be dissatisfied? Yes. Don't be satisfied with where you are spiritually. Be dissatisfied with that. That's a good, holy dissatisfaction.

[27 : 06] And then be prepared to put stuff out of your minds that shouldn't be there. Forget about what's happened in the past. Concentrate. Concentrate on the future.

Put your efforts in. Put your whole heart in. If you're going to do Sunday school teaching, put your heart in it. Whatever you're going to do, whatever you do, do it with all your might.

And then anticipation. Anticipate his words of commendation. Well done, good and faithful servant. Let's bow in prayer together. I want to pray two prayers this morning as we close.

And I want you to pray with me if you need to. I want to first of all pray a prayer for those who are sitting here this morning. And maybe you're saying, I'm really not sure if I know Jesus.

I'm not certain. Well, listen, my friend. If you're not certain, you need to make certain. You need to make certain today. You need to do it today and not leave it another day.

[28 : 12] The Bible says now is the day of salvation. Now is the day of grace. You don't know about tomorrow. You can't be sure you'll see it. So I want you, if you need to, pray this prayer with me.

Pray it in the silence of your heart. And mean it. Just mean it and be sincere. And be honest. And as you pray this prayer, if you want to be certain that Christ is in your life, pray this prayer.

Because remember Jesus said that he knocks at your heart's door. And if you open the door, he will come in. Say this. Father in heaven, I realize that I'm a sinner.

And I realize as a sinner, I failed you. But I'm coming to you now. I'm coming sincerely and honestly to you.

And I ask you to cleanse me from my sin. And I now receive Jesus Christ into my life. I ask you now to be my Lord and Savior.

[29 : 22] To be on the throne of my life. And I ask you now to make me the kind of person you want me to be. I pray this in Jesus' name.

If you prayed that prayer and you really meant it, then I ask you to come and talk to me afterwards and tell me that you prayed it and you meant it.

If there are others sitting here and you say, no, I know Jesus. I know Christ. He's in my life. I've been walking with him for years. Well, maybe you need, at the beginning of this new year, to pray a different prayer.

To pray a prayer of total commitment where God can take your life and he can use you in a mighty way. This whole world is desperate for those who will take the light.

So pray like this. Say, Lord Jesus, I know you. You've been in my life for many years. And I'm now asking you, at the beginning of a new year, 2017, to take my life afresh.

[30 : 38] And I ask you to be not only in my life, but be on the throne of my life. Be in charge of my life. I ask you to take charge of guiding me and leading me.

And I ask you to make me a useful tool, a useful Christian, a good member of this church. And that you would help us this year to accomplish much for God.

That when we get to the end of the year, we'll be able to look back and see all that's been done and accomplished in the name of Christ. We're asking this in Jesus' mighty name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.