

Transformed By Pursuing Jesus

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[0 : 00] Well, when I was growing up at school, I went to a very strong rugby school, Paul Ryss in Sennibosch, you might know it. For various reasons, I ended up not playing rugby, but playing hockey.

And, you know, the hockey at Paul Ryss was very, I mean, you did it, but it was the same as the guys that played chess. It was like, there was a few of them that did it because they couldn't play rugby, basically. And, you know, we were okay, you know, doing hockey.

We weren't winning, we weren't losing all the time, but it was very difficult to stay motivated because, or to aim for wins because it was never really a sport that was promoted. Until halfway through my school career, we got a coach that said just one thing that totally changed the hockey emphasis and the ethos at the school and got us to start winning tournament after tournament. And what he did, he said one thing. He told us we had to give him the will to want to win. The will to want to win. Now, I thought that was unique.

I've used this a lot in my life. You might have had the same thing growing up in your school. You know, I thought this guy was amazing and it really changed us. The will to want to win. He wasn't going to put pressure on us to win.

[1 : 15] We wanted to win, but we must, you must give him the will to want to win. And that changed everything. Just like my hockey days, we need this kind of will to want Jesus and that is going to change us into being transformed.

So maybe our transformation as we walk with God, as we walk with Jesus, you know we go through these ups and downs. We all do. Our whole life is going to be these cycles of times when we're really focusing on Christ and forging ahead and winning victory.

And then there's times when it's difficult and we're struggling. We've got to want to put in 110% effort into our change project. We must get the will to want to win at this race called life.

And the only way to do that is to run it by running after Jesus. In today's passage, we see Paul urging us like him to sort of chase after Jesus and to put this maximum effort in.

But before we look at how we chase after Jesus, we've got to realize one thing, and that is that Paul runs after Jesus because Jesus has already run after and caught up and in a sense caught Paul.

[2 : 30] We've got to get that balance right, otherwise it becomes something that the Bible says is not going to be helpful for us. And that is running after Jesus by our own works, by our own efforts.

Before Paul chases after Jesus, he first reminds us that he was first caught by Jesus. Now, I've got a couple of verses we've got to keep our Bibles open, but if you're like me, it's difficult to read your Bibles here at the moment.

But if you can, have a look at verse 12 in our passage. We'll spend most of our time here, so 12, 13, and 14. So Paul, well, let's just start at verse 10, actually.

Paul says this, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. But not just the power of his resurrection, but also, notice the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

And so, somehow, or in this way, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. So he wants to know Christ more, he wants to know the power of his resurrection. That sounds like something we can get hold of, but then Paul sort of takes a little bit of a jink turn there.

[3 : 37] It's like, okay, hang on. But I also want to know what it's like to share in his sufferings, because, and then, not just in his sufferings, but becoming like him in his death. So there's going to be this struggle element in the Christian life, and it's this way that we attain to the resurrection.

It's both knowing the power of his resurrection and sharing in his sufferings that we know Christ completely, and to know him more as we've been singing.

But Paul goes on, verse 12, and we'll spend a bit of time there. Paul says, not that I have already obtained this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Paul tells us he presses on to make Jesus his own, because Jesus has already made Paul his own, and that makes all the difference to Paul. Now, this order is vital in how our change works.

Jesus first changes us by doing a work inside us that only he can do. That washing away of our sin, dealing with our sins, making payment on the cross, these are things that we simply cannot do for ourselves.

[4 : 51] It's this amazing work of Christ dying for us in my place, so that God no longer counts my sin against me, that begins that process of change.

Now, before Jesus got hold of Paul on the road to Damascus, we all know the story, Paul was going places. He was one of these up-and-coming men in Judaism at the time, one of the leading lights.

And in fact, he was on the fast track to success. Here in Philippians, in chapter 3, just before our reading, he says, he recounts how far ahead he was forging in his life without God.

In chapter 3, from verse 3, he says, And yet, for all of that, he had really nothing.

Because he was trying to live his life on his own terms, in his own wisdom, in his own power, in order to impress and please God. And for all that outward show of zeal and righteousness and piety, his life was really going nowhere.

[6 : 25] Until Jesus found him and showed him that all of that was for nothing. Because the thing that Paul was looking for could no longer be found in his religion, in Judaism, but only found in Jesus.

And once he has Jesus, everything else he's ever achieved counted as nothing. That's what we read in verse 7 and 8. Whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss, rubbish, for the sake of Christ.

What's more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whose sake I've lost all things. I consider them garbage, junk, rubbish, loss, that I may gain Christ.

So, as we look at our transformation, our own transformation, in order for us to be truly transformed, we need to start with the same experience that Paul had at the same place.

The experience of being sought out, called out, and in a sense caught, held by Jesus. We can only really, truly change by being changed by Jesus first.

[7 : 41] Of having him transform us from the inside out. And that's why we continually go back to Jesus when we're looking at changing things in our life. We just simply can't do it without him.

He's the one that starts it. He's the power behind it. And so you've got to continually go to the source to get energized to do the change that we need. It's a bit like electricity, I guess.

You've got to plug it in, but, you know, they've got to get the source from ESCOM somewhere to get it going. So, we need to be careful in how we think of our relationship, of the relationship, between working to earn our salvation, because we're going to talk about making the effort of doing stuff that's going to change, and working because we have salvation.

Okay, so just to say that again, we must be careful in how we think of the relationship between working to earn salvation, and working because we have salvation.

Good works don't save us. Works don't save us. Working, spending energy, going to effort doesn't save us. But those who are saved do good works.

[8 : 48] Luther makes this point when he says, God doesn't need our good deeds, but our neighbors do. Now, the way that God has designed the whole system of Christianity is to work, the way that he's designed Christianity to work, is that he does the work to save us, and then he also continues that work in us by his Holy Spirit, so that we can work and do the things that he wants.

Does that make sense? He does the work in us, so that we can then do the work that he wants.

Loving our neighbor, spreading the gospel, and doing them better and better throughout our lives.

Paul makes this point back in Philippians chapter 2. He says, he tells the Philippian church to continue to work out their salvation, with fear and trembling, for, because it is God who works in you to will and act according to his purpose.

So you've got that dual thing going on there. Work hard because God is working in you. It's one of those spiritual ironies that the Bible calls us to. Okay, so make sure that in our change project that we have first been caught by Jesus.

Paul starts this whole section by wanting to know the surpassing worth of knowing Christ more and more. And that is the thing that's going to motivate our change.

[10:16] So being caught by Jesus will help us to run after Jesus better, to chase after him and to pursue him. So Paul is caught by Jesus. Now comes an important sort of a shift, a vital shift in his thinking.

Because Jesus has won all these things for Paul, he now wants to win everything for Jesus. And he's going to align everything in his life to the utmost to try and get Jesus and to try and get more of him.

Just because Paul has received all these benefits from Christ, it doesn't mean he's going to sit back and wait for Jesus to do things apart from him. Paul himself was jealous for God before, but now that he knows Jesus, he's going to go into overdrive and give more than he ever thought he could to be more and more like Jesus.

And so verse 12, verse 13, and verse 14 shows us the kind of effort that Paul is going through to reach what Christ has given him already, in a sense. So verse 12, he says, Not that I've already obtained all these things, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of me.

In verse 13, Brothers, I don't consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do.

Forgetting what is past, forgetting what is behind, and straining. So he's pressing on in verse 12.

[11:48] He's straining, struggling forwards towards what is ahead. In verse 14, Again, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

He's running towards the goal. So the words used, this is all words used of hunting and running and athletics. Verse 12, Pressing on to get hold of Christ, to make him, to get to know him better, is used of hunting, of a hunter chasing after his prey.

To earnestly pursue is a better, to press on, to earnestly pursue. You know, when you've shot your prey, and it's making its getaway, and you're hunting, and that's your food, you're making very sure that you're chasing hard after that, after the thing that you're hunting.

You're not going to let anything get, let it get away. Going all out, with a single-minded dedication, to get your prize or your goal. In verse 13, he's straining to what lies ahead.

That word is sort of stretching intensely for the finish line. You know how this, you know when you're running for the 100-meter dash, or however long the race is, and you know, you see how the guys, as they get to the line, and the one, I think I've seen one guy, he's actually dove, he dived ahead, and he actually won.

[13:07] His hands, I think they took his, his hands got that, that ribbon, and he just made it. Stretching intensely to finish line. It means to exert oneself to the utmost.

As much as Paul was zealous without Jesus, now that he's got him, he's pushing even harder to get more of Jesus, because he just knows the wonder and the worth of what Jesus has done for him. In verse 14, he's got this, he's got, he's got single-minded focus. He's got this one thing, this one goal. He's got one thing on his mind.

Now the goal is the end marker of the race. And like all elite athletes, he's got to consciously push other things out of his mind in order to keep the main thing, the main thing.

Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead. Like a runner who can see the finishing line, just ahead, just there. Paul refuses to look back, to check over his shoulder, but keeps straining every fiber of his being in pushing forward towards the end goal.

[14:24] So, if you find that your walk with God is stuttering, you're going along, but it's going okay, but it's not going up.

It might not be going down, it just sort of, might be treading water a bit. Maybe you're sort of bumbling along. Maybe it is going a little bit down. Maybe things are okay, but they could be better. Like Paul, we need to think through how much effort we're putting in to get rid of a particular sin in our life, or to deal with a particularly difficult situation, or to get more fruit of the Spirit in our life. So typically we're dealing with those three things in any given moment in applying Jesus to various situations in our life. We're either trying to, we realize, oh, I'm making a mistake in this one particular area, so I'm trying to get rid of something that's bad.

I'm getting rid of sin. Like we saw last week, you've got to take stuff off, but you've also got to put stuff up, to put stuff on. So you're either trying to put stuff off, you're trying to get more good stuff, the fruits of the Spirit, more patient, more loving, more kind, whatever it is, or maybe it's just a

situation at home and your family, or just something that's happened to you, some physical thing, and you're trying to handle that situation better.

If we're not handling it well, let's think about how much effort, how much work we're putting in to getting Jesus to help us with that situation.

[15:58] Paul is saying that Christians need to put maximum effort, 110%, the will to want to win, this driving thing to go somewhere, if we're going to see real breakthrough and real change.

Now think through the last big issue you're dealing with in your life. Maybe you're dealing with one at the moment. So if it's not really being resolved and you're sort of struggling around it, maybe one of the things is, okay, how much effort are we putting in?

How much effort are you putting in, firstly, to bring this situation to God himself, for God to help? We tend to want to jump in straight away and make the changes and we get that frantic, sort of frenetic, and we tend to say the wrong thing because we're operating out of a place of fear.

But how much effort is he saying, okay, I'm not going to do that, I'm going to take it, not hold on to me, I'm going to give it to God and ask him, Lord, please help me in this situation. And then you've got to do the waiting game.

But you've got to take it to God and ask him for help. Otherwise it's just waiting and nothing is going on. Secondly, how much are you working on asking God to change you before you ask him to change the situation?

[17:16] Oh Lord, this person is really, I can't handle this situation, they're doing this, they're doing that, please Lord, can you take the situation away, fix the situation. We don't really look at, Lord, how have I contributed?

Where do I need to change? So praying for ourself before we ask God to change the situation. Not to say that you mustn't ask him to help you change the situation.

Sometimes you're not contributing a lot and it's just this bad thing that's coming at you, that's fine.

But even in that, you can ask God to help you handle it better, to do things better.

And then thirdly, how much effort are you putting into looking for godly solutions to the problem?

Lord, please change the problem. I've prayed it. I'm just going to leave it.

God will make it, God will make it come right on our own. How about asking people for help? How about reading some books?

[18:16] How about researching what others have said about it? How they've stopped being angry, started being kind, stopped using bad words when they're frustrated and replaced it with good words.

How about putting some effort into finding godly solutions to the things that you're looking at? When we want change, does it look anything nearly as much as running and striving and stretching and chasing after Jesus?

Or is it more like a neutral, sort of Capetonian vibe? Oh, we should really do something about that at some point, hey? Oh, I'm sure it'll be fine.

Ah, just too much hard work. Maybe if I put my head down and ignore it, it's all just going to go away. But, you know, we all know what hard work looks like when you go to the gym and you have a seriously good workout or you do some really hard exercise in the garden or whatever.

You know, our muscles are sweating. You feel it afterwards. And that's the kind of thing that Paul is saying we must do if we're going to see change. We've got to do some really hard graft.

[19:31] It's going to look slightly different for all of us at different times. But let's get at least a baseline as to what we're talking about when we're talking about effort, making an effort in our change, in our change, in our transformation.

Okay, so just very practical. It's going to look different for each of us but there's some basic stuff that we've got to put in place. Now, I think the baseline effort, if you, if you're thinking about changing in your life and there's sins you don't want or there's things you do want, the fruits of the Spirit that you do want or a situation you want, what are you doing?

Okay, well, I go to church. Okay, is that putting in maximum effort? Oh, well, I go to church every Sunday. You don't know how hard that is. Okay, well, that might be looking like maximum effort for you.

But I would say that going to church, going to growth groups, praying and reading our Bible, I think those are the baseline. I'm not saying it's the bare minimum but those are the base blocks that we need.

Okay, going to church, going to growth groups, praying and reading our Bible. But if we do that, you know, in any given month, really, or even week, let's take Monday to Sunday.

[20 : 50] Okay, so I've got this thing, on Monday morning, I'm in my Bible, I'm praying about it. Tuesday, yes, I'm still there, I'm in my Bible, I'm praying about it. We all know by Wednesday, you know, look, I've prayed already twice, I've got up early, I've put in effort for two days.

You know what, Wednesday, you know, other things are happening. Thursday, you go to growth group, cool, that's okay. Friday, look, Friday is Friday, like, the weekend is here, I'm not going to, Saturday, I'm out, I'm doing my things, and Sunday, I'm at church.

So if you look at that, over a period of seven days, if you can, so you go to church, you go to growth group, you're praying and you're reading your Bible, very often, out of seven days, we're only praying and reading our Bible two, maybe three days of those seven days.

Seven days. That often happens. That's not putting in maximum effort, that's putting some effort, are you with me, that's not like maximum effort. In fact, once, I was needing to get rid of something in my life, it was actually just very bad responses to people when they irritated me, I let them know, I should be much better than I used to be.

Anyway, I went to see a Christian counselor, and she's like, yes, well, okay, well, here's some things, read this verse, read these verses, and it was a whack of verses, and pray about it.

[22 : 17] Okay, nice, okay, fine, fine, you know, you know, yeah, do that three times a day until it's gone. And I was like, three times a day, no problem, Monday, morning, noon, night, Tuesday, morning, night, Wednesday, night, Thursday, somewhere, Friday, it's Friday, and then it's Saturday, and then I'll go to church, I'll make it up at church.

So, and then when you meet up with them again, they're like, how's it going? I said, yeah, I sort of lost my cool, yeah, I said, oh, well, how much effort are you putting in? Okay, well, I gave myself, you know, five, six out of ten.

Does that make sense? So, putting in extra effort, maybe you need to read a Christian book, or start listening to Christian content about the thing you need help with, whether it's bettering your relationship with your spouse, letting go of bitterness, getting rid of anger, being more patient, being more careful with your money, maybe go do some research, Google it at least, or find something online to help you.

Better yet, go to a book, Christian Book Discounters in Claremont. If you just read the Christian life section, they've got a very good, how to live the Christian life better, and you just go, you know where Christian Book Discounters is?

It's in Belvedere Road in Claremont, you can Google it, and you just go and look at the Christian life section, how to live the Christian life, and you'll very quickly see, oh, you know, this thing actually is going to help me, this book is going to help me.

[23 : 48] Go and do that. More energetic, next level, more effort, go to speak to another Christian, and ask them for help, and then you'll really begin to see change.

And then, maybe you need to get down to do some serious prayer work, three times a day, however long it takes, to get some sort of victory, over the issue that you're dealing with.

Now, I'm a little hesitant to set it out like this, because this is not the only way that working hard, at our transformation looks like, but a large part of it is going to look like this. Doing the hard yards of finding Bible verses, doing the prayer, speaking to Christians, finding extra input from Christian books, and then focusing on it, and working, and killing it, and changing it.

Basically, there's no secret, there's no secret way of getting things you want, of getting all the good things you want in life, and getting all the bad, rid of the bad things. It's going to look like very ordinary, everyday graft, but it is going to take graft.

What you put in, is what you're going to get out. One last thing that Paul talks about, as he's going ahead, and reaching for Christ, is he's got to leave his past behind.

[25 : 15] So I just want to end by looking at that quickly. In verse 13, Paul says, Brothers, I do not consider myself, yet to have taken hold of the prize, it's really chasing more after Jesus, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind, and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal, to win the prize.

Forgetting what is behind. So Paul is leaving his past behind him. He's not carrying it around with him. He forgets about it. And it's not an automatic forgetting.

Everything Paul is doing here is deliberate, and calculated to achieve this, the prize of getting to know Jesus better. He's deliberately putting the past in the past, and leaving it there. He's pushing it out of his mind, and focusing on the task at hand.

All these elite athletes, they can't win. They can't succeed, and have a thousand things flashing through their mind, especially the mistakes they've just made. Think about tennis.

And that's hard. I mean, you might have been watching Wimbledon. I mean, you know, that's the problem with mistakes. They always pop up to trip you up, but if you're focusing on it, oh, I hope I don't, I hope I don't, I hope I don't, and then of course you're going to.

[26 : 31] So, in our transformation, in our reaching for Jesus, we've got to put maximum effort in, but we've also got to be clever. We can't just try and try and try and run around like crazy. Hey, maybe you just need to leave some of your past behind you.

We need to let go of our past mistakes, and failures, and sins, if we're going to run the race of change well. If you find yourself constantly pulled back in time to past events, past conversations, past things that you have done that were wrong, you need to make sure you take them to Jesus and leave them at the place that Jesus decisively deals with all evil in the world at the cross.

The way to forget about them is that if they start popping up, as they always do, you've just got to remind yourself that you have asked Jesus to heal and to forgive.

You've got to do some self-talk. That's how athletes do it. Okay. I'm not going to worry about that. I'm focusing on the thing that's happening right now. You need to do a bit of mind games there. And that if Jesus has indeed done that, if he's indeed healed and forgiven, if his death is their death, the death of the thing that you're worried about, then not only do you have no right to keep it alive, you can't actually do it.

If Jesus says your mistakes are in the past and dead and buried, just like he was, then your mistakes are in the past, and they are dead and buried. Don't go digging them up and playing with them again.

[28 : 07] Just leave them there. But you've got to do some self-talk. Okay, I'm going to... No, no. I'm running ahead. So fix on having more of Jesus and work at having less of the things that are tripping you up.

Let your past stay dead and buried by remembering what Jesus has done for you. If you need a good reminder, Philippians chapter 2, that amazing section in Philippians chapter 2, one of the best passages, to have your mind think about what Jesus has done for you.

Run with all the energy that the resurrection of Jesus imparts to you. Keep your eye on the prize, not of getting to heaven when you die, but of knowing more of Jesus now and of ultimately receiving your glorious body at the resurrection.

And you will see change and transformation happen more and more in your life. Let's pray and ask Jesus to help us do this. Lord Jesus, you've called us, you've chased after us, you've gotten hold of us.

And thank God for that, that you have first reached out to us and taken care of our sin and shown us your love. Lord, as we live life, as we run this race, Lord, we long to know you better and to work better at our relationship with you and in that way, change and deal with the sin in our life.

[29 : 41] Lord, give us the power of your resurrection more and more and the power of your Holy Spirit to energize and to motivate and to help us keep going and chasing after you, getting rid of our past, striving on with all the energy, with more and more energy, not knowing about the energy that we possibly can have because it comes from you.

It's infinite amount of energy to work hard at getting rid of sin, at getting more of the fruit of the Spirit and of dealing with situations in a more godly way.

Help us to do that. In Jesus' name. Amen.