

March 16, 2014 by Steve Brandon



The Pursuit of Knowing Christ

Philippians 3:10

1. Knowing Him
2. Knowing His Resurrection Power
3. Knowing His Sufferings

I always enjoy asking married couples their story--how they met each other, and how they came to marry one another. It's an easy question to ask. It's a natural question to ask. It helps to get a perspective of their past experiences. And yet, their stories are almost always interesting.

Some met in high school. Others met in college. Some knew each other from their youth. Others didn't meet until their 40's. Some met in a night club. Others met through an advertisement in the paper. Some were introduced by family. Others were introduced by friends. Some met before they were Christians. Others met after they were Christians. Some married young. Others married old. Some got married very quickly after they met. Others knew each other for years and years before they were married. Some eloped. Others had huge and elaborate weddings. Some were married before. Others were married just this once.

Now, as varied as the stories are, all marriage stories are essentially the same. Husband and wife heard about each other. They met each other. They began communicating with each other. They began to spend much time getting to know one another. Eventually, they decided to spend the rest of their lives together. And in the process, they have come to know much about each other.

There is not a couple married today that doesn't know more about each other now than they did the day they were married. That's because marriage is like that. It's one long educational session of your spouse. In fact, I tell those in marriage counseling that when you get married, you are signing up to get a doctorate in your spouse. In other words, when I married Yvonne, I signed up to get a doctorate in "Yvonne-ology." I need to know her. I need to know her likes and her dislikes. I need to know her strengths and her weaknesses. I need to know her expectations. I need to know her dreams. I need to know about her feelings and what's important to her. I need to know about her family and her former experiences. I need to know what she's going through now.

And for all of you married men and women, you all are enrolled in a course of becoming an expert in your spouse. Of course, all of your courses are different. Yvonne is engaged in "Steve-ology." Andy is engaged in "Adrianna-ology." Phil is engaged in "Karen-ology." Maggie is engaged in "Darren-ology." **The deeper you pursue your knowledge of your spouse, the better your marriage will be.**

Now, this morning, we aren't going to be looking into marriage. But, we are going to be looking at another relationship, which has some parallels. We are going to look at the relationship of a believer with the Lord. Now, in some ways, those of you who believe in Jesus have experienced the same process that married couples have gone through. Through some sorts of circumstances, you heard about Jesus. Someone probably told you about him, perhaps your parents or a friend. And then, you began to know more about Jesus. Then, you read the Bible. You read some sort of book about Jesus. You watched some sort of movie about Him. And then, over a period of time, you came to trust His message. You repented of your sin. And you believed in Jesus. And over the years, you have come to know more and more of Jesus. **The deeper you pursue your knowledge of Jesus, the better will be your walk with the Lord..**

Let's get to our text in Philippians. Our text today covers one verse, chapter 3, verse 10. Again, we are slowing down, because I want for us to savor these words. They are so rich. We will pick up some speed next week, as we work through at least verse 14. In this verse, Paul models for us how a believer should long to know Jesus Christ better and better. So, as I read it, listen and look for Paul's longing:

Philippians 3:10

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

Like all verses in the Bible, this verse comes in a context of Paul defending against the evil ways of the false teachers, whom he calls "dogs, evil workers, and the false circumcision" (3:2). These were those who put great confidence in their fleshly accomplishments, in their circumcision, in their earthly righteousness. And in verse 4, Paul segues into a brief testimony of his own religious works to show how he regards them as nothing. Not his circumcision. Not his tribal origin. Not his national status. Not his religious reputation. Not his education. Not his religious zeal. Not his righteousness. They are nothing compared with the value of knowing Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:8-9

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

To Paul, knowing Christ is everything (verse 8). "All is loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Because, knowing Jesus is eternal life (John 17:3). And not knowing Jesus is eternal damnation. Do you remember when Jesus described those who will seek to enter heaven based upon all of their religious merit? They said, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles? (Matthew 7:22). And Jesus said, "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'" (Matthew 7:23).

Knowing Jesus and Him knowing you is of all importance. Your eternity rests on this fact. And so, I ask you, church family, "Do you know Him?" Do you have a relationship with Jesus? Or, are you like those of whom Jesus spoke, filled with religious deeds, but devoid of the genuine knowledge of Jesus.

Last week, we saw Paul's perspective in knowing Christ. Knowing Jesus is more valuable than anything else you might possess in this universe. It is more valuable than material treasures; righteous deeds; religious knowledge; passion for God. Apart from knowing Jesus, all of these things are loss. That was Paul's point in verse 8, ...

Philippians 3:8

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

My message last week was entitled, "The Value of Knowing Christ." And in our text this week, Paul will show his longing to know Jesus more. My message this week is entitled, "The Pursuit of Knowing Christ."

You can see it there in the first 5 words, "that I may know Him." Remember, Paul is writing this, some 20-30 years after his conversion. He isn't talking about knowing Jesus for salvation. But, he's talking about knowing Jesus for sanctification. And the reality is this: All who possess Christ will pursue Christ.

Paul's knowing of Christ in this verse is a bit like a husband's knowledge of his wife. Yes, they knew each other before they were married. Yes, in marriage, they have come to know each other intimately. But, as the years have worn on, husband and wife have come to know each other more and more. And in those good marriages, a husband's desire is to know his wife more and more. A wife's desire is to know her husband more and more—deeper and deeper, day by day.

And this is what Paul is talking about here in verse 10. He's talking about an ever-deepening knowledge of Christ. Here's my first point, ...

1. Knowing Him

This ought to be the desire of every single one of you in this room, whether you have come to trust him or not. If you are not saved, if you don't know the Lord Jesus, this ought to be your desire. Knowing Jesus is your only hope for lasting joy in this life. Because, life will disappoint you. But, there is only one who will not disappoint. It's Jesus.

And knowing Jesus is your only hope for ultimate joy in the life to come. When Jesus receives those who have trusted in Him and served Him all their lives, He will say, "Well done, good and faithful slave. ... enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:25).

Do you know Jesus? Do you have this desire? It is He who bore our sins in His body on the cross. We but need to believe in Him. And as Paul said in verse 9, God will take our faith and consider it to be righteousness before him. "And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

If you know Jesus, do you really want to know Him? J. I. Packer writes this in his monumental book entitled, "Knowing God," ...

What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the "eternal life" that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. "This is life eternal, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God. "Thus says the Lord, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me'" (Jer. 9:23f). What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives Him most pleasure? Knowledge of Himself. "I desire ... the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6).

In these few sentences we have said a very great deal. ... What we have said provides at once a foundation, shape, and goal for our lives, plus a principle of priorities and a scale of values. Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord. [\[1\]](#)

God has created us to be in relationship with Him. And when we don't have Him, something is dreadfully wrong. In Psalm 42, we find the Psalmist away from God and away from the people of God. He is in depression and in despair. And he knows that something is wrong. And so, he writes, ...

Psalm 42:1-2

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?

He wants to be in God's presence with God's people. He wants to be with God. He wants to know God. It's not the case now, but he is longing for it; he's longing for it like the thirsty deer longs for a refreshing drink of water. And this longing, thirsting, hungering after God is thoroughly Biblical. David cried out in Psalm 63, ...

Psalm 63:1
O God, You are my God;
I shall seek You earnestly;
My soul thirsts for you,
My flesh yearns for you."

David was no stranger to the LORD. He walked with Him daily. And yet, he longed to be satisfied in God's presence. He knew the LORD. And yet, He was "following hard after God" (Psalm 63:8 KJV).

Do you remember when Moses was in the wilderness and the people of Israel had sinned by worshiping the golden calf? It was a difficult time. And Moses was distressed. He went before the LORD and pleaded for His grace. He said, "I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You" (Exodus 33:13). This was after Moses had seen the 10 plagues poured out upon Egypt. This was after Moses had been on Mount Sinai, receiving the 10 commandments. This was after Moses had been on Mount Sinai for 40 days. And he still was longing to know God.

Is this your heart? Do you have a longing for God? Are you pursuing Jesus Christ? Can you say with Paul, "That I may know Him"?

Now, this isn't knowing about God. This is knowing God! This is communion with the living God! This is relationship.

You say, "How do you do this?" Well, let me ask you this: husbands, how do you know your wife? Wives, how do you know your husband? You spend time with your spouse. You talk with your spouse. You listen to your spouse. You ask questions of your spouse. You learn about your spouse. You act and find out how your spouse responds.

It's the same with God. Only we can't interact with Him on the human level. But, He has given us a book to read, where we can listen to Him and learn about Him. And He has promised to hear our prayers. We can talk with Him and share our heart with Him.

It's really as simple as that. It's Bible reading and prayer. We learn about God by reading and listening. We speak to God by praying and crying out to Him. So, prayerfully read your Bible, ready to learn, ready to believe and ready to obey.

Now, this all takes time. But, if you really want Jesus, if you really say, "That I may know Him," you will make the time. Relationships take time and cultivation.

Again, like a married couple in love, they make the time. I have heard it recommended that you spent 15 minutes a day, an hour a week, a day each month, and a weekend each year with your spouse, spending time with each other, seeking to learn more about each other.

With the Lord, it is much the same--in the Bible and prayer each day, and when opportunity affords, some extended times as well. And here is what I have observed over the years. Those with the closest walk with the Lord know their Bibles very well. Those with the closest walk with the Lord pray often to the Lord.

You can't get around this. It takes time. Does your heart cry, "That I may know Him"?

Let's move on. The Pursuit of Knowing Christ isn't merely about Knowing Him. It's also about ...

2. Knowing His Resurrection Power

This is the second phrase in verse 10, ...

Philippians 3:10
that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection ...

Without a doubt, the resurrection was powerful.

Consider the ladies who came to visit the tomb. On their way, they were asking themselves, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" (Mark 16:3). Mark comments that this stone was "extremely large" (Mark 16:4). But, when they arrived at the tomb, "they saw that the stone had been rolled away" (Mark 16:4). The resurrection had power to roll the stone away!

Consider the effect of the resurrection on those who were witnesses to the event. Consider the effect on the guards! When the guards saw what happened, they "shook for fear ... and became like dead men" (Matthew 28:4). The resurrection had the power to put fear into the hearts and minds of the Roman soldiers guarding the tomb.

Consider the effect of the resurrection on the body of Jesus. When Jesus was crucified upon the cross, He really died. Those who placed Jesus in the tomb knew full well that He was dead. He hadn't merely fainted. Those who cared for Him felt his body growing cold. His temperature dropping at about 2.5 degrees Fahrenheit every hour. By the time he had been in the tomb three days, his body was the same temperature as the cold dark cave in which he was set. Rigor mortis would have set in, so that His body was stiff. In the normal process of death, gravity would drain the blood from the capillaries in the upper surfaces of His body and cause it to collect in the blood vessels in the lower surfaces, causing the skin near the top to turn pale, while his underside was darkened. All of the biological processes in his body would have ceased. No respiration. No blood flow. No synthesis of proteins. No cell metabolism, breaking down ATP to ADP. His body was a hunk of organic protoplasm.

The resurrection reversed the dying process. The biological processes began again. Life came back into His body! Jesus began breathing. His blood began flowing. His body temperature rose. He arose out of the tomb, scaring the living daylights out of the guards, and greeting the women who had come for Him. Over the next 40 days, Jesus made many appearances to His disciples. He taught them and ate with them and showed them with many convincing proofs that He was indeed alive. There was great power in the resurrection, to take a dead body and raise it from the dead.

But, when Paul talks here about "the power of the resurrection," I don't believe that these things were the first things he had in mind. I believe that he was talking about the effect that all of these things had in the lives of people. People who saw the living Christ. People who were filled with the Holy Spirit. People who were enabled to live lives fully to the glory of God.

You look at the apostles, after the death of Jesus. They were fearful of the Jews (John 20:19). They had locked themselves in a room for safety (John 20:19). But, after they saw the risen Jesus, those who were fearful of a pin drop became bold as a lion. The Sanhedrin didn't understand it. They saw Peter and John, whom they knew to be uneducated and untrained. But, they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). They had been with Jesus after the resurrection. And that changed everything! They were boldly proclaiming Jesus to be the only way unto salvation (Acts 4:12, 13).

Do you want boldness to share the gospel with others? Perhaps your coworkers or neighbors or family members? Know the power of the resurrection. It emboldened many of the disciples to die for Jesus. The power of the resurrection is able to empower you to tell others of their need for Jesus. And as people are dead in their sins apart from Christ, the resurrection power is able to make them alive to God!

So, pursue knowing His resurrection power.

But, I think of anything that Paul has in mind here, he is thinking of the sanctifying work that the resurrected Christ does in us. I say this because over and over and over again, Paul spoke of how the resurrected life changes those who believe in Christ. In some way, we actually join with Jesus in His resurrection.

In Ephesians, chapter 2, Paul speaks of us being "made alive together with Christ" (2:5). He says that we have been "raised up with Him, and seated with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). When we believe in Jesus, we get His righteousness (Philippians 3:9). When we believe in Jesus, we join with Him in His resurrection.

Now, it's not that physically we have died and now we are alive. But, spiritually, we were dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1). We were without God and without hope in this world (Ephesians 2:12). But, by grace through faith, God gives us new life. It's as if we were raised from the dead. It's as if we were seated with Christ in the heavenly places, right now!

And when Paul prayed that prayer in Ephesians, chapter 1, he prayed that we might know, "what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, [which is] in accordance with the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:19-20).

The resurrection power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that works in us who believe. And the result of this is a life that pursues the Lord.

Paul said something similar in Colossians, chapter 3, "If you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). A few verses later, Paul explains what this means: "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). The power of the resurrected life is the ability to overcome sin in our lives.

One of the clearest passages connecting the resurrection and our sanctification comes in Romans, chapter 6.

Romans 6:5-14

For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

I believe that this is Paul's main point when he speaks of knowing the power of the resurrection. This will become clear when we see how Paul is seeking to press on in Christ (3:14). In 3:19, Paul describes those who don't have this resurrection power. They are "enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:18), "whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is their shame, who set their minds on earthly things" (3:19). But, opposed to them, "our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (3:20).

Do you know Him? Do you know His Resurrection Power? Do you know the power of overcoming sin in your life? Perhaps you want more? Then pursue Knowing His Resurrection Power. Think long and hard about Easter. This is a great opportunity to dwell on His Resurrection Power. Let's move on to my third point. The pursuit of knowing Christ, is found in (1) Knowing Him, (2) Knowing His Resurrection Power, and, thirdly, in ...

3. Knowing His Sufferings

This is found in the end of verse 10,

Philippians 3:10

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

What a strange desire that Paul has. What a strange desire that I'm calling you all to have. In verse 17, Paul writes, "Join in following my example." So, church family, I ask you to join with Paul. Join in the sufferings of Christ.

Again, let's go back to our marriage analogy. If you want to know your spouse, then walk in their shoes. Find out what they are experiencing.

As most of you know, this past week, my wife and three oldest children took a quick trip to Los Angeles to look at schools for my oldest son. As a result, I was a single dad for my two youngest children. It means that I had to balance work and home. If something was going to get done around the house, I was responsible. Without my efforts, the house was going to be a mess.

Now, I must admit, I had it easy. We had everything in the home that we needed. The laundry was done for the week. The shopping was done for the week. Yvonne had put several meals in the freezer for us to enjoy.

Furthermore, there was some jealousy that could easily develop, with the younger two staying at home, missing out on the fun in California. So, we did some fun things, like see the Lego movie in the theater; like rent a few movies to see at home with a projector on the big screen, complete with popcorn; like take a trip to Walmart to buy the sugar cereal of their choice, along with a multitude of fun snacks; like take a walk on one of those warm days last week; like eat out for dinner at Linos and Chick-fil-A. We didn't even touch one of Yvonne's freezer meals. We were going to go ice skating, but I messed up on the schedule of when the rink was open. I promised that I would make good on my promise soon. I don't think that the kids missed mom and their older siblings very much.

But, I got a taste of what Yvonne goes through on a daily basis, and all of the ways that she serves our family so well. I so don't walk in her shoes. And my time alone, without Yvonne, has reminded me afresh of the difficulties of being a single parent.

Now, in some regards, this is what Paul is saying here in verse 10, "that I may know ... the fellowship of His sufferings." Now, there is no way that we can fully enter into the sufferings of Jesus. He bore the penalty for our sins. "All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way, But the Lord has laid the iniquity of us all on Him" (Isaiah 53:6).

Jesus faced the greatest injustice that anyone has ever faced. Of anybody else who has ever walked the planet, Jesus deserved praise and reward. And what did He receive? Mockings and insults and scourgings and crucifixion. And the suffering of Jesus was not merely physical, it was spiritual as well. He bore God's wrath for us. Jesus deserved life, but received death. He was punished for our sins.

And Paul says, "that I may know ... the fellowship of His sufferings." What does this mean?

Well, we have seen the word, "fellowship" before in this epistle (in 1:5). Paul was thankful to the Lord for those in Philippi. He said, "in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:5). Literally, "in view of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (that's how the King James translates it). The ESV and NIV read, "in view of your partnership in the gospel." The idea here is joining and sharing. That's what this word, "fellowship" means. It means that we "join in with" the sufferings of Christ.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean that we join in atoning for our sins (or for the sins of others). Only God can do that. No, but it does mean that we enter into the shoes of Christ as His ambassador and face similar sufferings. Following Jesus in a world that hates God will bring His reproach upon you.

This is what the early disciples experienced. Remember Peter and John? Empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:8), Peter preached Jesus to the multitudes. It landed Peter and John in prison (Acts 4, 5). Stephen preached Jesus and was martyred for it (Acts 6-7). Eventually John was put to death with a sword for following Jesus (Acts 12:2), and Peter nearly faced the same fate (Acts 12:3).

And Paul was no stranger to sufferings. Shortly after His conversion on the road to Damascus, he began to preach Christ in the synagogues (Acts 9:20-22). The Jews were not happy, so they plotted to kill him, "watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death" (Acts 9:24). It was only because Paul was let down through an opening in the wall using a large basket that he escaped their plans (Acts 9:25).

Paul's missionary journeys were filled with sufferings. He was kicked out of Psidian Antioch. He was kicked out of Iconium. He was kicked out of Derbe. He was imprisoned in Philippi. He was kicked out of Thessalonica. He was kicked out of Berea. He was ready to leave Corinth for the same reason, until the Lord intervened, saying, "do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10).

And in 2 Corinthians 11, Paul details some of his sufferings for the cause of Christ, ...

2 Corinthians 11:23-27

... beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Certainly, Paul shared in the sufferings of Christ. Certainly, it wasn't so pleasant. So, why did Paul long to share in the sufferings of Christ?

I have two reasons. First of all, there is blessing in suffering for Christ. Jesus promised, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12).

This was modeled by the Peter and John who were imprisoned and flogged for preaching Jesus. "They went on their way from the presence of [their suffering], rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). And any of you who have faced the scorn of the world because you are a follower of Jesus know this blessing. Paul knew that suffering was a gift: "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Philippians 1:29).

Suffering is a gift that brings blessing. But, I have a second reason why Paul longed to share in the sufferings of Christ, which is the spirit of this text. Suffering like Jesus brings us into a greater knowledge of Him.

If Paul says, "that I may know Him." One way to know Him is to know His sufferings. G. Campbell Morgan said, "Do not miss the blessedness of the fact that the fellowship of His sufferings means that He has fellowship with us. When I enter into the fellowship of His sufferings, I am not alone, for He is forever with me. I can endure no pain for Him that He does not share with me. When I stand in the presence of sin and suffer--if I have climbed high enough, in that moment He is with me, He is feeling the same pain, He is suffering with me." [2] God promises He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Paul finishes verse 10 with the phrase, "being conformed to His death." As we suffer for Christ more and more, we will be conformed into His image. We will be conformed into His death. Sufferings help us to loosen our grip upon this life. It will draw us to the Lord.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 16, 2014 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] J. I. Packer, Knowing God, p. 29.

[2] The Westminster Pulpit, volume 8, p. 98.