

## **Proper 22 (Living Up, In & OUT)**

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Philippians 3:4b-14

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### [OPENING SLIDE]

*"Upwards and Outwards"*

*"Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

### VIDEO INTRODUCTION

Well, there's a right way and a wrong way to be a blessing to your neighbors! *That* was the wrong way! 😊 Where, in our continuing series on the "four-legged stool," we come to the right way – Paul's way of living out by living up!

**Main Point:** Yes, with everything hinging on our living up in Jesus and His Calvary love towards us, we rejoice in the difference such a view makes in our prayers and our actions, that "shift from our [own] initiative to God's" (Burrell, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 4:138) Where, out of His great grace, continually poured into our lives, we rejoice to share that blessed hope with all whom we may be privileged to serve.

### [SLIDE # 2]

PRESSING UPWARD, WE PRESS OUTWARD TOWARD THE GOAL OF THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST.

Amen.

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Well, Paul is getting personal. Recounting his life, he revels in the joy that – while he was a sinner – God rescued him and brought him to Jesus. Yes, Paul wants his readers to know that he has experienced firsthand God's love in Christ; and that now, as a result of that gift, he will strive hereafter to live out the message he is privileged to proclaim. "Paul's personal story authenticates his message and gives his voice authority." (Crainshaw, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 4:136)

What is your story, disciple? And who might benefit from your sharing it?

[SLIDE # 3] You've no doubt heard snippets of mine throughout my 7 years as your Pastor. I've held little back on where I've come from, and the struggles I still sometimes face. But like the former slave trader John Newton [of "Amazing Grace" fame], I'm nowhere close to all that I hope to be. But I am *not* what I was. "I am what I am by the grace of God."

[SLIDE # 4] How about you? Who are you? Do you see yourself somewhere in Paul's story of redemption? Do you also feel that there may still be more you are called to do for Him, living OUT for Him?

Where, having come here by God's freeway of grace, *none* of us are the same ... *none* are what we used to be. Where, as that story of redemption and grace is still being written on the pages of our lives (in scarlet red), *none* of the markings that say we are people of faith is more telling than a congregation's heart-centered desire to make Him known. To take what we've been given, and to give it away.

*"The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay."* (Matthew 10:7b-8)

How do we do that? First, by ...

[SLIDE # 5] TAKING STOCK OF OUR S.H.A.P.E. [FROM SAUL TO PAUL]

***<sup>4</sup> If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had ["was to my profit"], I counted as loss ["refuse, rubbish, leavings, dirt, dung"<sup>1</sup>] for the sake of Christ. <sup>2</sup>***

Paul was uniquely shaped for the ministry God called him to. But it didn't come into full bloom until Jesus met him, and entirely rearranged his life.

Where, the things that were once central to Paul's life – his God-given religious identity (circumcision, member of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew, a Pharisee) and the pride of in his own achievement (zeal and blamelessness before the law) – he could now discard. (Adapted from Eddy, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 4:137) For Jesus had met him! And nothing, *nothing* would ever remain the same!

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<sup>1</sup> BAGD, 758; "In Greek it often refers to things such as a half-eaten corpse, filth, and/or human excrement." [Abel, *CPR*, 20:2, 20]

<sup>2</sup> "We should not *misread* vv. 4-6 as a statement of how *wrong* Paul once was. The first four things Paul lists are things not of his choosing, given him by birth, and therefore *by God*." That these are good gifts, even spiritual advantages, Paul will acknowledge elsewhere [e.g. Rom 3]."  
[Oschwald, *CJ*, 39:1, 66]

Child of God, we, too have made that journey – from Saul (his former name) to Paul. We, too, have been borne again in Christ. Where, with our baptismal identity, comes a new purpose ... what one commentator calls a renewed SHAPE: Spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, experience. [Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, 234-240]

Take stock of these. For who you are comes about as a *“gift of God – by grace through faith – not of works, lest any should boast.”* (Ephesians 2:8-9) Celebrate the journey God has begun and continues in you – from Saul to Paul ... secondly ...

[SLIDE # 6] EMBRACING THE ONE SAVING MESSAGE [FROM DEATH TO LIFE]

***<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order <sup>(1)</sup> that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— <sup>10</sup> <sup>(2)</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> <sup>(3)</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.***

This *is* the heart of our message – Christ crucified *and raised* for our justification. This is our one true aim. It is this one message we want others to see in us, so that when we “break the tape” – passing from death to life – friends/family will join us – because we lived out and shared that message with them in Jesus’ name.

[SLIDE # 7] Not unlike the laser-like focus of Frank Shorter, a marathon runner from the 1972 Olympic Games. Winning the gold medal in that event, his victory led to the “running boom” in the U.S. Millions were inspired to take up running themselves, many for sport and competition. Shorter’s goal was to win, going so far as to instruct his shoemaker, the night before the Olympic race, to shave as much as he could off of his running shoe, without sacrificing support.

The few ounces of rubber removed was enough. Where, over the course of 26.2 miles, which Shorter completed in 2 hours and 12 minutes, it made all the difference. Throwing off that small hindrance, Shorter remains the only U.S. male athlete to win an Olympic gold medal for the marathon. To say, there is no other message than of Christ dying and rising for us. Where, as sure as it is the heart of up, it most certainly is the heart of our living out as well.

Where, finally, we live out by ...

[SLIDE # 8] PRESSING ON TOWARDS ONE GOAL [FROM UP TO OUT]

***<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

[Paul says a little later in this chapter] *let us hold true what we have attained ... keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us ... [as] we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Philippians 3:16-17, 20)

Liberated from the need to *earn* our salvation leads us now to live it out ... to become marathoners with our Savior in seeing that salvation home. Having become partners in the covenant of God's grace, ours, too, becomes the call of "*forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead.*"

Part of that call?

[SLIDE # 9] Embracing the not yet, by embracing the now.

Be Juba [who upon symbolically "burying" his friend Maximus (aka Russell Crowe) in the movie *Gladiator*]: "I will see you again ... but not yet, not yet." We know where we're headed, but we aren't there yet! Leaving us work to do in Jesus' name.

[SLIDE # 10] Actively seeking the opportunity to make Jesus known ... "If necessary, using words" ... in "140 characters" or less ... making every letter of our life count!

Always, our primary aim of the life of faith ... is to know Christ. But where to know Him is "to pursue and share that 'prize' with personal and communal authenticity." (Crainshaw, 138) In the places we live, move and have our being. (Acts 17:28)

[SLIDE # 11] Always "*pressing on ...*"

Yes, "*press on,*" with the sign of the cross pressed upon your forehead and your heart at Baptism ... which *still* marks you as one redeemed by Jesus Christ.

"Press on," as the Holy Spirit presses His Word into your ears/heart, resounding as if in the hollow of an oak the enduring song of His forgiveness and grace.

"Press on," as our Savior's body and blood are pressed to your lips in the full assurance of your acceptance, your forgiveness and your calling.

"Press on," raining down "mutual conversation and consolation" upon your brothers and sisters in Christ, to encourage them in their race, blessing them and others with your holy presence in their time of need.

Covered in the blood of Christ, gifted in such abundance, we "strive toward spiritual maturity, until we finally take full possession of the eternal prize. This is why Christ has redeemed us. This is why God has called us to be his own." (*Sermon Studies on the Epistles (C)*, 36)

### **Conclusion**

[SLIDE # 12] In the days of the Pony Express, mail was carried by an organized relay of horseback riders between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California. A letter weighing up to an ounce could cover the 2,000 miles in 10 days.

To travel light, and increase speed and mobility, the men traveled light, wherein, to get riders, the Express advertised with ads like this one in an 1860 San Francisco newspaper: "WANTED: Young, skinny, wiry fellows not over 18. Must be expert riders, willing to risk life daily. Orphans preferred." There was never a shortage of volunteers.

"WANTED (this day): children of God, aware of their sin, but more of their Savior ... redeemed of the blood of Jesus ... male/female, young/old ... to forsake all, and follow Me – up, in ... and OUT!"

Know anyone who is willing? Someone with a heart for Jesus, *and* for a neighbor, coworker, friend?

### **[SLIDE # 13]**

PRESSING UPWARD, WE PRESS OUTWARD TOWARD THE GOAL OF THE UPWARD  
CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST.

*Amen.*

+SDG+

*[Friday E-mail:]* It seems that in our sports-saturated culture, we are continually looking to athletes to provide us with inspiration and hope. In this “hero-starved” world, these folks are paraded before us either to jack up sales for the latest product they’re peddling, or to provide us with a story of perseverance to carry on. Celebrities are everywhere – more than they used to be – from sandwiches to pills, from game shows to the latest talk shows. Me? I’m skeptical about the effect of all of this “star power” flooding our tweets and TVs. We’re looking in the wrong place, where nothing short of the right place will enable us to live fulfilling lives, up, in and out.

Enter St. Paul and his letter to the Christians in Philippi. Where, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> of our series on the “four-legged stool,” the imprisoned apostle brings us to it. In Philippians 3:4-14, Paul exalts the driving force in his life, and as well as for those who would walk in the light of God’s grace:

*“Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ ... Indeed, I count everything as loss [for] the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”*

Child of God, what stands in the way of seeing the world and our life in it in this way? What clouds your vision? What keeps you from fully living – fully engaging the up, in or out life?

Perhaps it’s time to recast your view. Take a moment, and recalibrate. There is no sin too heavy that it is not cast off by the forgiveness that Jesus offers. There is no burden so great, that Jesus will not help you lay it down, or get down in the trenches with you to shoulder it. There is no problem so pressing, that with your salvation already won, and Jesus clearly in view, that can compare to the surpassing worth of who you are in Him. Indeed, Christ is everything – the only sure thing to stand when sin, Satan, and this world would seek your undoing.

Let Christ be your goal. Indeed, everything the Lord has given to you is a gift, as He would press you into service for the sake of His name. God has given it to you. Most especially, He has given you new life in His Son. Be renewed in this.

Wherein, the Lord calls and equips us this week to faithfulness – to work for Him, to make His name known – be it at work, around the family table, in conversation

with a neighbor, or at play. Wherein, you don't need a sports star or celebrity to show you that. You've got Jesus – and so, everything you need to live up, in and out! SYOS.