

Title: MORE
Date: January 9, 2022
Subject: God has more for us to experience.
Scripture: Philippians 3:1 - 14

God isn't finished with us the moment we place our trust in Christ. He's not satisfied or content with getting us "saved" and then immediately taking us to heaven where we'll experience more because there's nothing more for the time on earth. There's more, much more. No matter if we're baby believers or have known Christ for oh so many decades. No matter the stage of our physical lives. No matter what kind of criteria we want to throw up. The Lord is busy re-creating and transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18). While he's busy preparing heaven for us, do we ever think that he's preparing us for heaven?

In our new series we're going to explore the MORE God has for us.

Various ideas were swirling around in my brain about the center focus, the title for this series. Some of them carried an athletic tone because we're coming up to Olympics and the playoffs for professional football -- "Game Plan for a Winning Life," "Training Camp." That connected to military boot camp -- a Boot Camp for Christians. Or "A New Year for a New You." How to Be Fit. Biblical Principles for Life. Back to the Basics. The Essentials for Being a Christ Follower. How to Be Like Jesus.

I settled on MORE. God has more for us.

Often the focus tends to be on disciplines, practices, techniques as if those are the only fundamentals. Those things are helpful and have a place, but there's more. There's character and attitudes. I heard a comment about NFL kickers that kicking is more than the fundamentals of timing, footwork, where to hit the ball, follow through. More important are attitudes like being level-headed, not too emotional, the ability to forget what happened on the last kick and bounce back.

Being a follower of Jesus Christ would be far easier if God put it in terms like: you shall read the Bible 23 minutes per day, you shall pray six times a day for 4 minutes each time. You get the idea.

Please turn to the passage read earlier – Philippians 3:1 – 14.

Ancient Jewish moms wished their sons were just like Paul. He had everything a momma loved. He had the kind of pedigree and accomplishments they could brag about as they were at market. "My son, the Pharisee..."

Paul's pre-Christian experience was remarkable. He was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, so he was born a Jew. He didn't have to convert to become one. He was from Tarsus. It was considered "no ordinary city" since it was an important center of commerce, education and a crossroads for travel.

He was from the tribe of Benjamin. The tribe was named for the youngest son of Jacob, the one closest to his father's heart. They had a reputation as brave and skilled warriors. They produced the first king of Israel,

always a bragging point. Queen Esther was a Benjamite. Another reason for pride. They aligned with the tribe of Judah to follow Solomon's son as king which resulted in them not going into captivity as soon as the northern tribes. They were so revered that two gates into Jerusalem were named for them. There was also a gate into the temple compound named for the tribe. They walked with a swagger to their steps.

He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. Sounds like double talk but it's a claim to being a pure Jew. Nothing non-Jew in him. Nope. He spoke the language, knew and practiced the traditions, exhibited the accompanying attitudes including extreme pride in being the chosen people of God...to the disregard of other peoples. He lived the life.

Paul was a Pharisee. He knew the Mosaic Law forwards and backwards and the hundreds of regulations developed by men to help explain and interpret the Law. Ask him anything, go ahead, he'd likely dare you if he thought you might be disrespecting him, or merely to show off. Pharisees were known for that. He'd have an answer. He'd been trained by the most respected teacher of Judaism at the time.

We don't know Paul's last name but his middle name was "zeal." He didn't just possess, excitement, enthusiasm and eagerness. He was gung-ho, charge, full speed ahead, attack and leave no prisoners. Well, he did leave some as prisoners. They were his enemy, the followers of Jesus Christ and they deserved whatever he could dish out. It began at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58 – 8:1). He stood by and was the coat attendant. That makes it sound like he was simply there and those who killed Stephen put their coats at his feet. At the least, he made sure no one would steal the garments. Some have said watching the coats meant he was in charge of the stoning. Whichever way it was, Paul gave his approval.

Then he launched a feverish campaign to exterminate the infidels. He was a ravenous wild animal on a rampage. "Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison" (Acts 8:3). Breathing out murderous threats, he got permission from the high priest to go to Damascus to see if he might find men or women who were followers of Jesus and bring them back as prisoners to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1, 2). He persecuted followers of Christ to their death (Acts 22:4).

Paul was faultless in keeping the legalistic standards for righteousness. I mentioned how this was part of being a Pharisee. They were proud of how they were able to keep the smallest detail of the code developed pertaining to God's commands. They were scrupulous. They would give a tenth of their spices—mint, dill and cumin (Matthew 23:23). Harvested plants are easier to count, but if the plants went to seed... Do you know how small those seeds are? Mint seeds are the smallest. They look like poppy seeds, teensy tiny specks. It takes 1250 mint seeds to weigh 1/10 gram which is .0035274 ounce. Imagine the tedious nature of trying to count out a tenth of those seeds. But that's what the Pharisees would do to make sure they were in complete conformity to all the ultra-legalistic rules and regulations.

While Paul was part of that lifestyle, he viewed himself as being and doing what was good and right and holy and necessary to be in good standing with God. The truth is he was simply living according to tradition, a way of life where he was separated from God.

He came to that realization when he met Jesus Christ as his Savior. He now considered all the things of his pre-Christian life to be a loss. He had been self-focused and was changed to being Christ-focused. He made a complete 180.

He loudly proclaims there's nothing that measures up to having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It's much more than knowing facts about him. Anybody can know the facts, but it doesn't mean their life will be changed. Paul was dramatically changed when he placed his full confidence in Christ's work of living a perfect life, dying on the cross as the sacrifice for his moral crimes against God and rising from the dead. He no longer depended upon himself and what he could do. His goal, his priority, his sights were on knowing Christ more and better.

If Christians were to vote about the person throughout the history of Christianity who was most likely to have achieved all there was to achieve, I think the apostle Paul would win in a landslide. He's frequently put on a pedestal.

He didn't feel that way. In v. 12 he says he hadn't obtained everything or already been made perfect, complete. He knew he hadn't arrived. He wasn't experiencing all Christ had for him. He's not merely talking about what Christ has for him in heaven. It's in his mind as the ultimate goal. He yearns for heaven and to be united with Jesus to eventually gain the prize Jesus will give him. He'll be awarded the victor's crown, the crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:7, 8).

That was always in his mind, but his focus was on what was happening in the interim before he would get to heaven. He wanted more. He viewed himself as being in a race, a long-distance race. Each time he put one foot in front of another, there was something more to experience.

V. 13 again talks about the things of the past. Paul said he was forgetting what was behind. This would include Paul's life as a follower of Jesus Christ.

He had tremendous accomplishments. Philippians was his seventh book that made it into the Bible. He would go on to write 13 or 14, depending on whether Hebrews was by him. He wrote other letters as well. He travelled around the Roman Empire, over 10,000 miles by foot and Mediterranean slow boat. He experienced incredible blessings such as a personal encounter with Christ after the Savior had risen from the dead. He was transported to the third heaven, to paradise, where he heard inexpressible things that man is not permitted to tell (2 Corinthians 12:2 – 4). He demonstrated "the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles" (2 Corinthians 12:12).

At one point, he felt forced to defend his ministry against those who were viewed as "super apostles," but were masquerading as apostles of Christ. Paul dipped into his chest of medals and awards, the marks of his apostleship. "Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was

pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food” (2 Corinthians 11:22 – 27).

This was who he was and what he did. Yet none of it truly mattered to him. There was something more that he desired. V. 8 “the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” V. 10 “I want to know Christ.” He knew there was so much more. Who can exhaust the wonders and beauty and majesty of Christ? What human, who among us, can ever fully probe the depths of Christ?

Don Quixote, the literary creation of Miguel de Cervantes, embarked on fanciful quests in pursuit of restoring knighthood to its rightful position. In his deluded state he believed windmills to be giants and a flock of sheep an army to fight.

Paul’s quest wasn’t a flight of fancy. There were real enemies to fight but his was the ultimate pursuit. V. 12 “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” He wanted to seize and possess...to forcefully grab and own as his. He didn’t want to run the race in vain.

In another Scripture Paul uses more athletic imagery when he exhorts Timothy and by extension, all followers of Jesus Christ, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” (1 Timothy 6:12). Taking hold of the eternal life wasn’t meant to encourage Timothy to get saved. Rather, it was to get a vise-like grip on this thing he’d had since he was a kid and by now probably in his 30s.

Paul had a holy longing. Some people call it a holy dissatisfaction. That designation seems like it could lead to negativity, grumbling and complaining and judging because it could place the dissatisfaction on others and doesn’t work toward solutions. That would be unholy dissatisfaction. If holy dissatisfaction is properly understood as applying to who we individually are and how we individually are living, that’s okay. It’s a sense of longing, desire, stirring, aspiration for something more than what the person is experiencing.

On the back of the sermon notes is a piece by John Piper called “Eighteen Aspects of Holy Dissatisfaction: A New Year’s Agenda for Growth.” Piper identified 18 biblical themes and were italicized by him. He connected the themes with words like grow, increase, changing, abound, strive to excel, and more and more. I bolded these. Some of themes on Piper’s list fit with what I’ve picked so we’ll be elaborating on those over the next few weeks. This list would be an excellent resource to keep, refer to and pray over. By the way, Charles Stanley has a book and other resources with the title *30 Life Principles: a Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God*. Other respected Christian thinkers and teachers have compiled lists, some more extensive than others. We’re going to limit our study to about a dozen.

Let me throw this out there. If you think of something you think might fit with the idea of MORE, let me know. We can talk about it to see if it’s something to add to or replace what I have.

We aren't that far from the beginning of the New Year. I used the past week of daily emails to focus on newness starting with the fact we become new creations and then moving on to how we are in the process of being made new (Ephesians 4:22, 23; Roman 6:4). We have a new self which is being renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16). We are to keep clothing ourselves in new clothes (Colossians 3:10, 12).

God has always held out the offer of more. Let's take a brief stroll through biblical history. Abraham. He probably was content in his homes in Ur and Haran (Genesis 11:31 – 12:5). After all, he was rich. He had a lot of property and servants to take care of all his stuff. He had by many accounts a real nice life. But he heard the voice of God calling him, telling him, "I have something more for you." It included the promise of incredible blessing for and through him, a promised land and a son in his old age.

Moses. He'd grown content on the backside of the desert after living there for 40 years. He'd settled into a nice routine – take the sheep out to pasture, feed the sheep, bring the sheep back in the evening. God said he had more for him – you will bring the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10).

The Israelites. There was initial excitement when Moses showed up with "good news" of God's plan, they didn't exactly jump at the opportunity to leave Egypt even though they'd been there for 430 years. Sure, conditions were rough, they were slaves and all that, and pharaoh was engaged in genocide, but hey, at least they were alive. They had a hard time believing when things got tough and accused Moses of being the means through which Pharaoh would kill them (Exodus 5:21). They needed convincing the Promised Land was better than what they were experiencing. They needed to see the plagues that destroyed Egypt.

They faced more challenges the wilderness. They complained about the good old days being way better than what God said he had in store. They had faulty memory syndrome. After the spies returned from the Promised Land the people definitely thought what God offered was far less than what they had since it came complete with monstrous giants, never mind how much he promised (Numbers 13:31 – 33).

Gideon was informed he would be a mighty warrior.

David. He went to the battlefield where war had been raging . . . not so much. Israel and the Philistines had settled into a peaceful yet uneasy coexistence and stalemate. Let the big fella Goliath come out everyday, beller about hating God and wanting to fight, then let him return to his troops. Live and let live had worked for a while. David understood God had something more for his people and volunteered to fight.

The prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Malachi were spokesmen for God that he had something more in mind. Sometimes the more pointed to the Messiah who would be coming.

Elijah thought he had done enough. He felt he was all alone and that God should just take him home. God told him he had more for the prophet to do.

Jesus offered the disciples, the fishermen, something out of this world -- fishers of men.

God has more for us and he'll continue to do so until he takes us to be with him. We are to hand the keys of our lives over to God and see where the drive takes us.

Reread Philippians 3:12 - 14.