

I was converted into Christianity, entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ at First Baptist Church of Texas City, Texas, which is a blue collar community down by Galveston. So that's where I came to know the Lord pretty powerfully. So I got saved into an environment where my eyes were opened and I actually studied it where I don't now that I studied it a lot before. And there were a couple of things I think were good things but dangerous things early on. I'll give you an example. Those of you who are Baptist may be able to follow me here. At First Baptist Church Texas City, if you didn't miss Sunday school for a significant period of time, you got a pin for that. And if you made it for a second consecutive year, there was another pin that fit onto that pin. And if you made it a third year, there was a pin that fit onto the pin that fit onto the pin. And on and on and on it went. So by the time you graduated high school, you could look like Patton. On top of that, they had RA's and GA's. That's Royal Ambassadors or Girls in Action. Both were meant to teach children about the mission field, both local and abroad. Think Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. You could wear patches and you had uniforms. So if you dominated in Sunday school and also dominated in RA's and GA's, all these little monuments you got showed you and everyone else that you accomplished them. Now, I don't think that there is anything wrong with any of that. If you haven't missed church in years, well done. But again, I think that's like being a natural athlete. I don't know that you have a whole lot to do with that. That means you had health, that means those around you had health, that means you were able to get a vehicle here and on and on I could go with that.

But I also think that has a real dangerous edge to it. I'll tell you why. We're going to pick up reading this text in Philippians 3 in verse 7, but the first six verses are Paul going through a list of things like that. And he's basically showing that in the world of external religious activity, he would smoke any of us. He literally goes down the line and says, "There is not one of you that is more externally righteous than I am. So you can compare anything you've ever done, anything you've ever memorized, anything you've ever accomplished religiously, morally to me and I'll make you look like a fool. I'm Jordan and you're the guy who has a decent game at Lifetime Fitness. That's the difference between us. I'm Tiger Woods and you shoot par." In the end, this is Paul's point, but what he says next is what I think is unbelievably significant and I think we need to look at it, especially considering the fact that we are heading into a new year. Verse 7, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 that I may gain Christ 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— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Now, here's why this is so profound and here's why I think we need to talk about this moving into the next year. Paul said, "Take all of those pins, take that sash that says I memorized Ruth and I have been to the third heaven, take all of that and put it in a pile and if it hadn't gotten you Jesus, it's rubbish, it's dung, it is poo. Do you hear just how profound that is? If I could say it just like I want to say it to you, who cares? If you memorize the entire New Testament, if you're in every Bible study we can offer, if you've never seen any questionable movie, if you've never talked like this, if you've never been to this or if you wouldn't do this but you don't now, love, worship and follow Jesus Christ, you have wasted your time and what you have done is meaningless. That's Paul's point. He said, "All that religiosity, all of that morality, all of that perfection under the law is rubbish next the surpassing greatness of Jesus Christ." He's saying that loving Jesus Christ and knowing Jesus Christ and worshiping Jesus Christ is by far better than all those external activities that you could do that you think somehow curry favor with God. That's unbelievably significant.

Now why do I think that's significant for this time of year? My wife and I are not wired alike. That's part of both of our sanctification. So we are making the turn here at the Flower Mound campus to go to Saturday night services, and I've already tried to start operating on that system. So I came up here to the office yesterday and did a little work, and I finished up the Habakkuk series so I could know how many weeks it was going to go so I could get that information to Jeff who writes the small group notes. And then we could begin to build out around it. And then is started setting goals for next year because when it comes to that, I'm a little bit of a nerd. So I want to set goals and then I want to reverse engineer them so I know what I have to do Monday to reach that goal. Because I learned a long time ago if I just go, "I want to do this in 2011," it's never going to happen. I need to trace it back to, "If I want to see that happen in 2011, what do I need to do on Monday to get me closer and get me headed in that direction? What do I need to do on Tuesday? What do I need to do Wednesday? What do I need to look like at the end of the first quarter?" That's the level of nerdiness that probably makes some of you uncomfortable. Now my wife the exact opposite of that. In fact, the quickest way to get into a fight at my house is ask my wife about her goals. Because she does have goals, but they're kind of like, "I'd like to write more." I'm a fixer, I'm a man, so my response is, "When are you going to do that? Have you figured out a time when you're going to get that done?" She'll say, "I'd like to learn to play some more instruments." "Okay, well what day of the week are you going to do that? How are we going to make this work?." So she's not wired that way and now she's like, "Get off me. I just want to write some songs." So we're just a little bit different. And for people with my type of personality, the reason this time of year is so dangerous is because if we're not careful, we'll begin to play with tools instead of digging for treasure.

I'll just tell a little story that Jesus told. Jesus tells a story of a man who found a treasure buried in a field, and in his joy, he went and sold everything he had and bought the field. Studying the Bible is not the point. Jesus is the point, and an active discipline around the Scriptures is a pursuit of the treasure Jesus. If it's not, it's rubbish. Sharing the gospel with our friends and with our neighbors is not an end unto itself. It is an obedience to God that enables us to know and walk with more of the treasure that is Jesus Christ. And on and on I could go here. But if you set up a whole bunch of goals and you don't have the desire to know Jesus, then all those goals according to Paul are rubbish.

But Paul doesn't leave us hanging. He starts to build it out with these high-level thoughts and ideas that I want us to look at. It will get practical near the end, but for the most part it's going to be high-level and just thinking. They're going to be truths that we have to know. So let's look again at the second part of this text. "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. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do. . ." This first little bit is actually a bit comforting, because Paul is a guy who's like on a skyscraper with his cape blowing in the wind. But here he's going, "Not that I have already obtained these things, not that I've reached perfection." Now here's just something I want to impart to you. In an Evangelical culture that wants you contented, I want to make you as discontented as I possibly can in a way that is holy. If the God of the Bible is an inexhaustible fountain of joy, vitality and life, shouldn't we all be a little frustrated? Is anyone satisfied with the level of joy you're walking in if what has been promised is infinite, eternal joy? So Paul here is just different you and me. When people are sick around here, we pray for them like the book of James commands us to. Paul doesn't do a lot of that. Paul goes, "You're not sick anymore." Now that's different. Is there anybody in here doing that right now? We will start a ministry with you tonight if that's you. So Paul is a different kind of guy. He's been to the third heaven. He's a brilliant man. But do you hear him? He wants more. He's not satisfied. He has been bitten by a deadly snake and suffered no ill effects, he has seen the dead raised to life, he has cast out demons, he's watched the lame walk, he had done all these things and more, but in his own mind he has not reached the depths of what Christ has offered him in the cross of Christ. And you can hear it here. "I'm not there. There is more to be had." And this is a man who says, "I've learned to be content in all things. If I'm wealthy, praise His name. If I'm poor, praise His name." And through it all, he's going, "There's more. Oh that I might know Him."

So I guess my question for you would be this. Is there really a seriousness, is there really an earnestness in you about knowing, following and worshipping Jesus Christ? I want to bring it up as often as I can because I think it's such an issue here. Your attendance here means nothing. It's rubbish. You coming to church does not signify you being a Christian anymore than me being tall signifies me being a basketball player. If you haven't seen me play, it's quite embarrassing. So I think quite a few of you have just bought into this cultural weirdness where you believe that because you're a good guy and come to church, you and God are cool. And I'm asking are you really pursuing Jesus Christ and is there in you a desire to know Him, worship Him and follow Him? I'm not asking if you're doing that perfectly. I'm not asking if you're running as fast as you can. I'm just simply asking about a desire, a seriousness to know Him, pursue Him and follow Him. Because that's his first high-level idea.

And then look where he goes next. He's then going to begin to unpack how we really stoke into flame that desire to know Him, walk with Him and follow Him. So let's look at it again in verse 13. "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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained." He's going to unpack two ideas here. The first one is going to take some work, and the second one I think is a lot easier to grasp and that's where we'll get practical.

So he's got this little phrase here that says, "forget what lies behind." Now that's a problematic phrase because a whole lot of the other Scripture tells you to remember what's back there. Whether that's Psalm 77 or Hebrews 11 or the fact that Christ institutes communion, which is a remembrance. Over and over again in the Scriptures, God tells His people to set up altars of remembrance, to have these things in their lives that remind them of God's faithfulness, God's coming through, God's rescuing them out of whatever circumstance they found themselves in. So you have to do a little bit of work with this idea of forgetting what lies behind. I think ultimately it has to do with the gospel redeeming shame and guilt and uncleanness. Have you ever been a part of something that you can't believe you were a part of? Have you been a part of things that at the time you justified them, where you knew it might be wrong but you were intoxicated in that moment, only to wake up under a weight of shame, guilt, a feeling of oppression and filthiness? Now what we do know from the Scriptures is that Paul had been a part of some unbelievably dark things. Acts 7 and 8 record Stephen's first sermon, the only sermon he got to preach before they killed him. So they kill Stephen, and the text tells us that the entire crowd goes at him at once all together. They drag him to the outskirts of the city and begin to pelt him with rocks. They take off their outer garments and hand their outer garments to Saul (who later becomes Paul) and he holds them while they brutally kill Stephen. And the Scriptures tell us he was heartily in approval. So he didn't just approve; he heartily approved. Now, we find out in Acts 8 that Saul is breathing murderous threats against "the Way," or the believers in Christ. And he goes to the ruling party and asks for permission to head to Damascus and hard press the Way. So he gets papers issued from the governmental authorities to go into Damascus and continue to do what he's been doing, arrest, imprison, harass and terrorize followers of Jesus Christ.

Shame is this unbelievably powerful emotion and weight that, if the gospel does not penetrate and redeem, will absolutely burn everything inside of you and around you to the ground. Here's what happens when someone walks in shame and feels unworthy, unclean and dirty. Whether they know it or not, they will sabotage all the relationships around them out of some strange sense of control. "I can make you reject me so that you won't end up rejecting me." Or "I will keep you at such a distance so that you don't really know me and you don't have the shot to reject me. So in the end, if you do reject me, I can feel okay about myself because you never really knew me. You just knew what I let you see." And this is a game that plays itself out over and over again with the men and women in this room. And it's based off of shame. It's based off of a feeling of unloveliness. Either you willingly participated in something that brought about that shame or you did so passively. And by passively, I'm speaking of abuse cases here. Because a lot of young men and

young women are sexually or physically abused and carry shame, because in some twisted way, they blame themselves for what happened to them when they were kids. But they carry that feeling of dirtiness inside of them and then allow things to happen to them and they are a part of things that they wouldn't be a part of if they didn't just feel unlovely. "So who cares? Forget it. I've already been used and abused. I might as well just continue on this path." And you keep everyone away from you and you grow lonely and angry.

Now the power of the gospel is the destruction of those memories. That's the power of the gospel. Let me show you this at work. Flip over to 1 Timothy 1. We're going to pick it up in verse 12. Even in verse 12, you really begin to see the grace of God invading and overpowering wickedness. "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service. . . ." Now the question you have to ask yourself is, "When did He appoint Saul to become Paul?" On the road to Damascus. It wasn't like Paul was converted and then all of a sudden noticed how he handled the Torah and was like, "You know what? I think we can use this guy. I think if this guy's on our team, we're going to be able to reach the gentiles. We stumbled on to this one, Jesus. Good job, Holy Spirit." That's not how it occurs. According to Timothy 1, it's Paul's understanding that God called Paul to serve God when Paul was at his absolute worst. It's what made him such a worshiper. He's on the road to Damascus to terrorize and imprison the people of God when God says, "Not anymore. You're going to love Me, serve Me, follow Me, exalt Me and confess Me to the ends of the earth." There was an overwhelming reality to Paul that while Paul was at his most wicked, God saved him.

Let's keep reading. Verse 13, ". . . though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." Now here's what makes Paul so dynamic. Say you're the religious type in here, say you're the older brother who never left home, you didn't take your inheritance, you didn't run off, you're not the prodigal son, you've grown up in church, you're a good kid, you had the Sunday school pins, you had the sash, you did Bible drill, you did all those things, but Paul goes, "I'm more righteous externally than you could ever hope to be." And let's say you were born with a joint in your mouth and a Playboy in your hand and it just got worse from there. Paul is looking at that and smirking and going, "Fool, please. Did you ever take up to killing God's people as your primary job? Adultery? That's junior varsity. Get out of my face with that." Am I taking away from the pain and sorrow of adultery? Absolutely not. What I'm trying to show you is how ferociously the grace of God invades. Because Paul says, "I am all of these things." And when did God save him? When he was all of those things. Don't miss the time line. The time line is unbelievably significant. It's not years and years and years later. God saves him while.

Now let's keep going, because there's something here for you and me that I think is unbelievable. Verse 16, "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." Do you hear him? You've got no excuse. There are some of you in here who have been playing church for so long that you have absolutely convinced yourself that a real, dynamic, alive relationship with Jesus Christ is just not going to be yours. You have compartmentalized your life so when you go to a little worship thing, you can worship and you know when to bow your head, you know when to raise your hands, you know when to agree, you know when to look at your Bible, you know when to write and you have learned Christianese. You can nail it, but in your heart, when it's just you and your lonely, empty self laying in bed, you have convinced yourself that a dynamic, living, powerful relationship with Jesus Christ, that is all the joy you could ever need or want, is simply not for you. And some of you have even used certain theologies to justify that. But Paul is going, "No. You're wrong." But then there are others of you who think that you're the one that's gone too far. Like you're the guy who has figured out how to sin more powerfully than the cross can forgive. And so you're so intrigued by the message of the gospel, but in the end never will enter in because it can't be for you because you did this, you did this and you did this. And the Bible

just gave you Paul as a clear historical evidence that God will dwell in, walk with, empower and powerfully use men and women who have been a part of horrifically wicked things. And this is how grace overcomes our past.

Let me tell how it works in a community like ours. If you've ever been to one of our baptism services or watched some of our testimony videos, it's insanity, because people are coming clean with very dark, wicked stuff from their past to strangers. Most of us don't even do that in our inner circle. Now think that happens. Just in the last year, we've had people on testimony videos that came on the screen and said, "I've been dabbling in witchcraft" to ten thousand strangers. "I used to be a witch. . . my husband and I were swingers for a while. . . I've been divorced three times. . . I was abused severely. . . I was raped." Who says that to ten thousand strangers? People who understand grace. Because the gospel takes what was meant for destruction and celebrates the glory of God's forgiveness and restoration in what was broken. That's how the past gets forgotten. That's how it gets redeemed. That's how it ends up being celebrated. If we're thinking spiritually here and we're thinking two kingdoms in conflict, one hellbent on your destruction and the other desiring your reconciliation to God, and the kingdom that wars against your soul and lies to you and you fall into those lies to then watch the gracious God of the universe take that trap, take that stumble, take that fall and then use it to exalt the other kingdom, how frustrating is that for the kingdom of darkness? How frustrating to the kingdom of darkness is it for us to be wooed into an adulterous affair by our own wicked hearts and by the lies of the enemy and only have God flip that story on its head and it become one of God's grace and mercy despite our lack of self-control, despite our vision and despite our foolishness? And it happens over and over again. It's the past being forgotten, redeemed and reconciled. Nothing gives me more energy than that. "Forgetting what is behind."

And then he says one more thing, and we'll be able to break down some of the practicalities of this. He says, "Not only do we forget what's behind, not only do we let grace reconcile and redeem what's behind," but he says it in a couple of different ways. "We strain for what is ahead." I love his use of words there. Because straining doesn't sound easy. Like I don't have to strain to walk, or I don't have to strain to read. Straining is work. He says the word "toil" in other places, which is great. He says, "We strain for what is ahead, we run as one who wants to win the prize." Not only do we forget what's behind, but we strain for what's ahead. No one accidentally becomes godly. It simply doesn't happen that way. You toil, you strive, you work. "Well isn't that legalism?" Not if you're digging for treasure. It's legalism if you're reading your Bible just to read your Bible, to check off some list and let everybody know you're reading your Bible. It's legalistic to memorize Scripture if your goal in memorizing Scripture is to let everyone know that you've memorized Scripture. It is legalistic to share the gospel with others if you believe that sharing the gospel with others somehow gives you right standing before God. But none of those things are legalistic if we're doing those because they get us more of the treasure of knowing, walking with and hearing from Jesus Christ. Toil, strive, push.

Let me show you my favorite text on this idea. I find it to be a beautifully masculine text. It doesn't have to be, but I've always just read it that way. 1 Corinthians 9, starting in 25, "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable." ESPN has been rolling out this great series of documentaries called 30 for 30. The thing that has struck me about these athletes and these events as they're highlighting them, is the absurd self-discipline that some of these athletes possess. They work tirelessly for just a few seconds of payout. Some of them literally measure out their food. They have a scale in their kitchen going, "This is how many ounces of protein I need. . . this is how many ounces of blueberries I need. . ." I don't measure blueberries, I'll admit that. I feel good about myself if I'm just eating blueberries. That's healthy. That's a win. We should just take it at that. I don't go, "You know, I really overate on those blueberries." That just never happens to me. But these guys have it down to a science. "I need this amount of fat, this amount of protein and this amount of carbohydrates, and I need them to hit my system at this time after the workout so that I might have optimal strength, optimal power, my body might recover and be ready to go." And they do all of that and push their body to the brink so that with ten seconds left, they'd be stronger than their opponents. They do it so when the game was on the line, they would have more legs.

But here's Paul's point. For what? That's his whole point. They do this to get a wreath that's perishable. One of the episodes of 30 for 30 was on a tailback named Marcus Dupree. He was a beast of a running back from Philadelphia, Mississippi. He was literally a man among boys. He went to the University of Oklahoma during the time they dominated. In the end, Dupree had his knee blown up. And in this documentary, he goes back to the house his deceased mother used to live in. It's this old trailer, all busted up and it's filled with trophies, newspaper articles, covers of sporting magazines. They were like these significant, unbelievable trophies just sitting there covered in cobwebs and dust. All that work, all that blood, all that sweat, all that hype for what? Was it great in the moment? I'm sure it was. I don't know. I'm not an athlete. I'm sure that in that moment winning those trophies felt so significant. But do you know what he is today? A documentary.

In another one, Troy Aikman actually talks about what it's like to retire at 36. He talks about having this game consume you and then all of a sudden be gone and then be left trying to figure out what life is all about when it has been all about becoming better and getting better. He talked about the idea that once your brain gets there and you know the game, your body is gone. If that's not the book of Ecclesiastes, I don't know what is. Solomon laments this. He goes, "Just about the time you figure out life, you die." And that's kind of what Aikman is lamenting. Just about the time you figure out the coverage, just about the time you get the game right, your body won't do what your body is supposed to do anymore. You're starting to look more like Darth Vader than a man. So this is his point here. They have all this discipline for what doesn't really matter in the end. But we have this discipline because it goes on and on for eternity. And what we gain in joy in Jesus Christ continues to grow and flourish for eternity.

So this next verse is where we get into some of the practicalities of it. Verse 26, "So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified." Now there are two ideas here. One is, "Where are you running? I don't run aimlessly. I know where I'm going, I know where I'm running and I know where I'm headed." And then you've got a bit of violence here. "I don't box the air." Do you know why you don't box the air? For the same reason you don't chase the wind. It's futile.

So there are a couple of questions I think you need to ask moving into the new year with all the idea of newness at the forefront. The first question is where are you running? I'll ask it like this. When are you going to read your Bible? When are you going to pursue the treasure? How are you going to go about doing that? What I know this week is that the gym is going to be a nightmare. Do you know what I also know? I only have to put up with it for three weeks. I can take a notebook to the gym tomorrow morning and meet people and tell you who's not going to be there three weeks from now and who is. A guy without a plan, a guy who is just looking around, a guy who is trying to do exercises on the water fountain, a guy without a plan, a guy who doesn't know when he's going and what he's doing is simply not going to go long and will not do much for long. Just as this is true of the body, this is absolutely true spiritually. When are you hunting treasure? How are you hunting the treasure that is Jesus Christ? I think you have to answer that. So whether that's this Bible reading plan or you want to get into this group or you want to try to find some place to dive deep into biblical community, you've got to have a plan. Otherwise, I think you're running aimlessly.

Some of you lay in bed at night and dream about what could have been if you just learned Spanish when you were in high school. "Do you know how awesome I'd be right now. . . Oh if I would have learned to play an instrument back then. It's so hard now. . ." Okay, there's no flux capacitor. It's not happening. You're not going back in time to learn Spanish. And even if you could go back to the 10th grade, I don't think you've thought through the ramifications. You're going to be surrounded by 10th graders. There are some holes in the theory. Now what you do have is today. That's what you've got. You forget what's behind and let God redeem it. We have today. And today is absolutely shaping Matt Chandler tomorrow. Today is shaping you tomorrow. You are cultivating the you of 2012 this year. Some of you have been stuck in

the same goofy cycle for decades. "I'm going to get this. . .I'm going to get that." Are you running aimlessly? Or do you have your path?

The second thing is he's got this great analogy about boxing the air. Do you know where you are week and do you know where you need to fight and engage? Is your marriage a train wreck? That might be a place to fight. You might go, "We're already doing that all the time." That's not what I meant. That might be a place to really put some work in this year and to really diligently find all the joy of Jesus Christ and His grace in your marriage. Maybe you've got a legitimate lust issue. That's something that needs to be subdued and fought and defeated by the grace and mercy of God. I could go on and on here, but where is the fight this year for you? I think if we go, "I want to hunger for God. I want to follow after God. I want to know Him more deeply, follow His grace and really be compelled by His mercy this year," then I think you need to think through if you're forgetting what is behind and how you are straining for what is ahead. Now ultimately this is what's ahead – you and me dead and standing in front of Him. That's ultimately what's coming for you and for me. I'm not a fool. We've done funerals every year in my eight years here. Very few of those have been for 70-year-olds. Some of you just saw your last Christmas. "Don't fear-monger me, Chandler." I'm not fear-mongering you. I'm telling you that's reality. Some of you just opened your last set of Christmas presents. What's ahead for you is a face-to-face meeting with your Maker.

Now there are two things. There is plenty of reason to be terrified for that, and there's plenty of reasons not to be. It's this really beautiful mixture of joy and fear where we plead the blood of Christ. Can we be confident in that? Absolutely. Why? We have not pursued righteousness that is of our own by the law, but righteousness that comes by faith in what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. Isn't that the word of Paul? So this is my hope and prayer for you going into 2011.

Let's pray. "Jesus, thank You for these men and women. I know You know the days that You have marked out for us. We know that Paul's understanding in Galatians 1:15 was that You called him to be a minister to the Gentiles before he was born. So You knew that entire time he was stumbling about, that entire time he was being extraordinarily religious and wicked that You were going to redeem and restore all of that. So thank You that this is how You work. Thank You that our confidence is in the cross. Thank You for the mercy given to us by Your saving and merciful hand. So let us not build on a foundation that won't last, let us not build on a foundation that won't sustain, but may we grow more and more confident in You and in Your beautiful gospel. Thank You. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."