

"Salvation"

Philippians 3:12-14

INTRODUCTION

1. Well, it finally happened...

I got stuck in a snowdrift. I mean, it wasn't a little bit stuck. It wasn't "pull forward, back up, pull forward, back up and drive out" stuck. I was *royally* stuck.

I was so thankful for my son-in-law who pulled me out with his four-wheel-drive pickup and a tow rope.

I don't remember the last time that happened. But, I've been driving in northern winters for more than 40 years, and it hasn't happened very often.

2. Some of you are thinking, "*Well, Bob, how could you let that happen? What would cause you to risk getting stuck?*"

There's only one answer...

3. Now, with all the snow days we've had in the last few weeks, some of you have been stuck at home with your kids—and it's been a little less than wonderful. And, some of you have been stuck with the kids long enough that you feel like...

This!

4. It's one thing to be stuck physically, but it's also possible to be stuck spiritually. Maybe that's where you are today.

Maybe you're stuck in your ways. You want comfort. You like things to go your way.

Maybe you feel stuck in fear. Maybe fear has a grip on your heart, and your life is paralyzed by fear.

Maybe you're stuck because you are afraid to take your next step with God, because of what someone might think or how you might be labeled.

5. At some point all of us get stuck spiritually. How do we keep moving?

The Apostle Paul gives us an insight into that question in the third chapter of Philippians. You might want to turn with me to Philippians 3 this morning. These verses set the tone for our new series called . . .

"There's Always a Next Step"

Over the next four Sundays we're going to identify four significant milestones in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ. We will talk about ...

- salvation
- baptism
- groups
- mission

6. Now the apostle Paul describes how to keep moving spiritually when he writes these words in Philippians 3:12.

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal...” (Philippians 3:12a—NIV)

Before we go any further, let's review Paul's credentials. He was radically changed one day as he was traveling to the city of Damascus in Syria. He saw a bright light from Heaven, met Jesus on that trip, and his life was transformed. He began to travel around the Mediterranean, sharing the message about Jesus. He was shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, and left for dead.

But what did he say?

“I haven't arrived...”

Do you know what? Neither have I...and neither have you. Turn to your neighbor and say,

“You haven't arrived.”

But let's read on...

“...but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it...”
(Phil. 3:12b-13a—NIV)

7. In other words, Paul is saying—*the goal of life is to take hold of what God has for me.*

Let's keep reading...

“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”
(Philippians 3:13B-14—NIV)

Did you get that? He says we are supposed to *“press on.”*

In other words, we can't afford to coast or get stuck. *There's always a next step* in our relationship with God. No matter how long you have known God this morning, there's always a next step for you.

That's why we encourage every one of you to...

- get in a service
- get in a group
- get involved

Eg. You might be familiar with the Australian coat of arms. Two animals are pictured on the Australian coat of arms.

One animal is an emu, and the other is a kangaroo. Do you know what's true about both of those animals? They can only move forward. The kangaroo has a big tail, so it can't go backwards, and the emu has a three-toed foot that causes it to fall if it tries to go in reverse.

That's a good picture for us. God's goal for us is always to move forward in our relationship with Him. There's always a next step.

If you've ever run in a race, you know what Paul's describing.

Eg. Several years ago, a couple in our church launched a ministry called "Team Hope." Some of you know it's designed to raise money for our orphans in Southeast Asia through running road races. In fact, Team Hope is sponsoring a big race in May. It's called "*Sock It to Child Trafficking 5K*."

Now, I like to run. Roxanne and I support three different orphans. So, it only makes sense for me to run in that race.

8. Well Paul describes life like a race. He compares the Christian life to a race that was run at the Isthmian games, which were the Olympics of Paul's day. The goal of that race was to win a prize, which was typically a wreath.

But the race Paul describes is the race to know God better. It's the race to know Him passionately and intimately...and be all that He designed us to be.

9. So—how do you get in that race? How do you "press on" for what God has for you?

Well, this spiritual race involves having a relationship with God Himself. And if that relationship is going to be what it can be, I have to understand five basic principles...

- These ideas will change your life!

1. IT'S A RELATIONSHIP I WAS CREATED TO HAVE.

The Bible says it like this:

"The Lord has made everything for his own purposes..."
(Proverbs 16:4a—NLT)

You and I are not accidents. God never made anything without a purpose. This means you and I are created by God and for God.

Look at these words:

"For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him." (Colossians 1:16—NIV)

You might want to underline the words "*through Him* and *for Him*."

Let me ask you something. What's the purpose of your life? Is it about your dreams and your career and your ambition and your family? Or, is it about what God wants for you?

In the book of Genesis, we read these words:

*“So God created human beings in His own image.
In the image of God He created them; male and female
He created them.” (Genesis 1:27—NLT)*

We were made in the image of God to have a relationship with the God who created us.

We are not meant to be alone. God created us to live in a relationship with Him. We are social creatures who have been designed by God and for God.

But...

2. IT'S A RELATIONSHIP I DO NOT HAVE.

One of the biggest lies today is when you hear someone say, "He is such a good guy." Sometimes, you'll go to the funeral and hear, "She was such a good person."

Here's the deal... Without God, that's a lie.

Isaiah wrote these words:

*“But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will
not hear.” (Isaiah 59:2—NIV)*

Sin is a big deal! It's such a big deal that it separates us from God. It is when I choose to go my way instead of God's way. If we die without addressing that problem, the Bible says we will spend eternity in hell separated from God.

Paul wrote these words to the Romans:

“As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.

All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” (Romans 3:10-12--NIV)

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” (Romans 3:23--NIV)

Here's the dilemma. We know that's true. We know we don't live up to our own standards, much less the standards that God sets for us.

And because that's true, we are separated from God.

Someone called that "*cosmic loneliness*." We want to believe our lives have meaning, but apart from God, that hole is never satisfied.

Eg. It was the French philosopher, Blaise Pascal, who said that we are all created with a "God-shaped vacuum in us."

We can have people around us and run from one relationship to another, but we will never fill the vacuum without God. Nothing can take His place.

Eg. Years ago, the Beatles sang a haunting song called, "Eleanor Rigby." Do you know the words to that

song? *"I look at all the lonely people. Where did they all come from? I look at all the lonely people. Where do they all belong?"*

You and I are created to have this relationship with God. We don't have that relationship because of sin.

There's a third principle...

3. IT'S A RELATIONSHIP I CAN HAVE.

It's no secret that we live in a world of bad news. We hear about it every day--a shooting in a movie theater... a terrorist attack.

Do you know why? Because sin has left an impact on everything in this world, including your life and my life. "The whole world is groaning... The answer isn't political, it's spiritual.

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ is good news.

Eg. If you go to the doctor because you think something is wrong, that's bad news. But if the doctor tells you that you're healthy, that's good news.

Eg. For generations, this division between bad news and good news was pictured in the Jewish temple. Gentiles were not allowed to enter the Temple. In fact, a warning read: *"No foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure around the Temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death."*

Do you know what the Bible says?

"...you...have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he... has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility..." (Ephesians 2:13-14—NIV)

Peter wrote these words:

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit."
(1 Peter 3:18—NIV)

The bad news of this world is that sin has impacted everything. Just ask a parole officer or a social worker or a detective or a counselor.

The good news of the Gospel is that God offers everyone a relationship with Him on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Eg. The great author C. S. Lewis was a professor at Cambridge and Oxford. One day Lewis was walking through the hallway of the university and came across a chalkboard where other professors had described the religions of the world. They asked Lewis to come into the classroom and attempted to trap him....

They said, *"What's the difference between Christianity and all of these religions?"* He looked at the board and said, *"That's easy. Grace."*

You see, there is nothing you and I can do to rescue ourselves. Nothing that we can do will satisfy the hole in

our hearts. The good news is that God has done something for us in Christ. It's a relationship we can have with Him because of Jesus.

but...

4. IT'S A RELATIONSHIP I MUST CHOOSE BY FAITH.

Now—make sure you get this. You might be at the starting line of the race. But you are not in the race that Paul describes in this passage until you accept the fact that Jesus Christ has paid your entrance fee. He has satisfied all the requirements of God.

How **do you** accept that payment?

You do two things...

Believe

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16—NIV)

Believe that you were made to live forever. Believe that you were made for relationship with Jesus Christ. Believe that no matter what you've done—God offers forgiveness.

Receive

Receive God's forgiveness by faith in what Jesus Christ fully accomplished for you through His death on the cross.

"Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—" (John 1:12—NIV)

For some of you in this room – this is your next step. You need to make the choice to begin a relationship with God. If you've not done that, I invite you to do that this morning.

"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9—NIV)

Many of you have made that choice. You're thinking. *"Bob, I understand this. I am a follower of Jesus Christ. I have placed my faith in Him."*

Then I have one question for you: How often have you mentioned His name in the last week to someone?

You might say, *"Well, I guess that hasn't happened. That's not very realistic for me."*

Well, how about the last two weeks? How often has the name of Jesus come from your lips, speaking with someone who has yet to begin a relationship with Him?

Still struggling? How about the last month? Or the last three months? Or the last six months?

That leads us to the fifth principle...

5. IT'S A RELATIONSHIP I HAVE TO SHARE.

A relationship with God is one that you either have to start or you have to share.

You see, God's goal for your life and my life is not merely to "get you in the door." He is not merely looking to provide you with "fire insurance." He wants your life to make an impact on others.

Paul wrote these words to the Romans

"But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them?" ``
(Romans 10:14—NLT)

Maybe you're saying..."I don't really know how to share this with others." Now you do! All you do is start with this question – "Do you have a relationship with God?"

God saved you not just for Heaven. He saved you to make a difference in the lives of people around you. He saved you because He has a plan for your life.

CONCLUSION

If you're looking for something deeper in your walk with God – this is it. Realize that you have a relationship with God to share with people. This church is a beautiful mosaic of people and experiences that God can use to impact this community.

What would it look like if every one of us in this place looked at our lives and the lives of others through that lens?

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