

ONE HOLY AMBITION: TO EXPERIENCE CHRIST (Philippians 3:10-11)

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” That is a question we often ask kids. When I was young, children had such answers as: an astronaut, a teacher, a doctor, a fireman, a policeman. Today, kids have exotic ambitions of what they want to be. They want to be a superhero like batman, spiderman, the hulk, or a power ranger. Some girls want to be a princess or a ballerina. I came across some interesting answers:

A 4-year-old girl said that she wants to be a *tattoo artist*. No one in her family even has a tattoo. When she was asked why she wanted to be a tattoo artist, she answered, “You get paid to draw on people, and they pay you lots of money for it.”

A 5-year-old boy answered that he wants to be a *ninja chef*. He has come up with a very specific working schedule. Monday through Thursday, he’ll be a regular chef. Then on Friday, he’ll turn into a ninja chef, but he plans to be off on Saturday and Sunday. No weekend work for him.

A 12-year-old boy from Australia wants to be a *Dealer in antique Swiss Alp horns*. This boy has never played a Swiss Alp horn, and he’s never been to Switzerland, but he fully intends to buy and sell them for a living.

My favorite answer was from a 4-year-old girl. When asked what she wants to be when she grows up, she said, *Myself*. She asked, “If I became someone else, who would be me?” That’s a good question. As that 4-year-old girl grows up, I hope she never stops wanting to be the special self, God created her to be.

You see, God created you to be you, and there is no one more qualified to be you than you. We do need God’s help, however, to be the best version of ourselves that we can be.

That question, “Who do you want to be when you grow up?” is not just a question for kids. I was still asking that question when I was 45, but I worded it a bit differently. I was asking, “What do I want to do?” I had been a full-time chaplain at a major medical center. I had been the full-time, senior pastor of several churches. I had been the manager of a successful, award-winning hotel. At the time, I was the principal of a highly respected, Christian school. I was also serving as a part-time co-pastor of a small church. I found myself asking the question, “What do I want to do?”

At the time I was contemplating that question, I was in Fort Worth for a conference geared for the principals of Christian schools. Since I had a few hours off the second day of that conference, I drove to a downtown Fort Worth bookstore. The religious books were on the second story, and it was there that I found a sale table. On that table, a book caught my eye. The name of the book was *The Call*, written by Os Guinness. I found a comfortable chair and began reading. Before long, a sentence jumped off the page and grabbed me by the collar. The passage read, “To ask yourself, ‘What do I want to do?’ is the wrong question. You should ask yourself, instead, ‘Who am I?’ When you know who you are, you will know what you are to do.”

I asked myself, “Who am I?” I answered the question immediately. “I am a preacher.” I’m not a hotel manager. I am not a school principal. There are many things I am not. What I am is a preacher. I am a preacher by my calling. I am a preacher by my training. I

am a preacher by my experience. I am a preacher by my passion. I am preacher. That is who I am; so, preaching is what I am to do.

You may not be able to answer that question as easily I can. Let me give you some help. If you are a Christian, if you have trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, I know who you are. You are a disciple. A disciple is a learner and a follower of His Teacher. A disciple longs to be like His Master.

The only book of the NT other than the gospel accounts that uses the word *disciple* is the Book of Acts. You find the word *disciple* or *disciples* 30 times in Acts. Every time it refers to a follower of Jesus. In Acts 11:26 we read, “And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.”

If you are a Christian, you are a disciple. That’s who you are. Based on who you are, you can easily deduct what you are to do. That is the thought behind Paul’s words in Philippians 3:10-11. Paul ended v. 8 of Philippians 3 with five important words that expressed the initial ambition of his life: *that I may gain Christ*.

That is how you and I become a Christian. You become a Christian when you gain Christ. That is not where the Christian life ends. That is only where it begins. From that starting point we go on to an even greater goal.

Paul expresses this second and superior goal in the first five words of v. 10: *that I may know Him*. Knowing Christ is the dominant theme of what follows because the remainder of v. 10 and v. 11 is the outworking of knowing Christ. In these verses, Paul does not give us four different goals. He gives us one, holy ambition and three specific ways that one ambition is realized.

When Paul writes that he wants to know Christ, he is not saying that he wants to learn facts about Christ. The sum of the Christian life is not filling notebooks or your head with biblical, theological, and historical truths about Jesus. To know Christ is to experience Him.

The best way to experience someone is to live with that person. I knew some things about Ruth Ann before she and I got married on December 29, 2016. Now that we have been married about 4 years, 4 months, and several days, I know her much better. On the whole, what I have experienced has confirmed that I made a good decision. The Bible says that he who finds a wife finds a good thing, and I have found something good.

I have experienced her companionship. I have experienced her unconditional love. I have experienced her cooking which I love, though not unconditionally. There has been a time or two when I have said, “Let’s not try that again.”

And during these 4 and 1/3rd years, she has experienced me. She has experienced my moods, my idiosyncrasies, my odd habits, my schedule, and my life as a pastor. She knows what is important to me and what is not. She knows what I value and what I don’t. And although I have admittedly not always done a good job of showing her, I hope she has experienced my love.

As you and I get to know Christ, we have the benefit of living with Him because our heart is His home. He is with us 24/7. We have the privilege of experiencing His forgiveness, His love, His joy, His peace. As we continue to live with Him, we are to learn what He values, and His ways, and His goals for us.

Let's look at the three things about Jesus that Paul said he wanted to experience, and we can, too, when it is our ambition to know Christ.

When We Experience Christ, the Power That Raised Jesus Will Flow Through Us

The word that is translated as *and* in v. 10 is a supple word. By that, I mean that the word doesn't always mean *plus*. Paul is not saying, "I want to experience Christ plus I want to experience the power of His resurrection." As a conjunction, this word *and* is joining Him with what happens when we experience Him. This verse could be translated, "I want to know Him in the power of His resurrection."

As you and I experience Jesus, we want to experience His power at work in and through our lives. Let's ponder for just a moment the power that God exerted when He raised Jesus from the dead. By the way, we need to distinguish the difference between resurrection and resuscitation. So far, in all of history, there has only been one person who has been resurrected, and that one person is Jesus.

Jesus raised several people from the dead, but He didn't resurrect them. He resuscitated them. After having been dead, their silent heart began to beat again, their dormant lungs began to take in oxygen and give off carbon dioxide again. Their inactive brain began to function again as synapses began to fire. They who were dead were alive again. They were resuscitated.

Through the years I have seen many people resuscitated. Often, such people are patients already in the hospital. A Code Blue is called. Doctors and nurses rush to the room with a crash cart. CPR is administered. Powerful drugs are given. Those who were dead for several minutes are brought back. They are resuscitated.

There is one thing that is common about those who are resuscitated. Every one of them, eventually, dies again. Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus brought him back to life. His sisters were thrilled about that, but I bet Lazarus wasn't. He was doing just fine when Jesus goes and brings him back. Now, he has to die again, and although the Bible doesn't record it, eventually, Lazarus did die again.

When a person is resurrected, he or she is given an immortal body, one that is fit for eternity. It is a body that will never die. It is a body that will never need a knee or hip replacement. It will never need heart bypass surgery. It will never get clogged arteries and require a stint. It is a body that will never experience kidney, liver, or heart disease. It will be eternally healthy and eternally functioning.

Just imagine the power that God released when He gave Jesus a resurrection body. Paul said, "I want to experience that magnitude of power in my life."

The Greek word the Paul used is the word from which we get our word *dynamite*. Dynamite is an explosive power, but there is a big difference. Dynamite blows things up, but God's power is that which grows us up. Dynamite is destructive, but God's power is constructive. God uses His power to grow, build, and fashion us into something that will bring Him honor and glory.

Paul wants that kind of power at work in his life. Do you? Do you want God's power to grow you, shape you, and make you into someone who will glorify Him?

Pastor and author Tim Keller tells a story about the power of Christ's resurrection. He said there was a pastor in Italy who saw the grave of a man who had died centuries before, and that man was an unbeliever. He was completely against Christianity, but apparently, he was a bit afraid of it, too. This man left instructions that when he died, a huge stone slab was to be put over his grave so that he would not be raised from the dead just in case there was a resurrection from the dead. As per his instructions, when he died, a huge, stone slab was placed right atop his grave. According to this minister from Italy, there were even inscriptions put all over the slab saying, "I do not want to be raised from the dead. I don't believe in it."

Evidently, when the man was buried, an acorn must have fallen into his grave because a hundred years later that acorn had grown up through the grave and split that slab of stone. It was now a tall, towering, oak tree. The minister looked at it and asked, "If an acorn, which has power of biological life in it, can split a slab of that magnitude, what can the acorn of God's resurrection power do in a person's life?"

Keller commented:

The minute you decide to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, the power of the Holy Spirit comes into your life. It's the power of the resurrection—the same thing that raised Jesus from the dead . . . Think of the things you see as immovable slabs in your life—your bitterness, your insecurity, your fears, your self-doubts. Those things can be split and rolled off. The more you know Him, the more you grow into the power of the resurrection.

The resurrection power of God at work in your life is not a possibility. It is a certainty because some weeks ago we read in Philippians 1:6 that when God starts a work in your life, He won't quit until He finishes it.

You get to decide whether you will work with Him or whether you will work against Him.

Let me encourage you to work with Him as He makes His power operable in your life.

When We Experience Christ, We Will Participate in Christ's Sufferings

Paul had a goal that, honestly, not many Christians share. He wrote that he wanted to share in Jesus' sufferings. I wonder, is that on your to-do list? Has that made it into your 5-year plan? I have to admit that we in the American church are much more into safety, pleasure, and convenience. That may also be why the church in America is not growing while the church in third world countries is growing and especially in places where there is a cost to being a follower of Jesus.

Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me." Once again, the church in America is not much into denying ourselves. We are more interested in pleasing ourselves, pampering ourselves, and

promoting ourselves. We also don't like the idea of taking up our cross, and certainly not daily. We are okay with wearing a cross around our neck, but actually bearing a cross, which is an instrument of death and torture, that just doesn't sound very appealing. Is it any wonder that we are growing weaker and having less influence upon our culture with each passing year? We have declined because we have chosen to recline, but the church is growing in places where to be a Christian means you have to suffer for His Name.

Paul desired to share in Jesus' sufferings, and he did. Let's look at what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11. Paul was defending himself and his ministry against his detractors who sought to limit Paul's influence. Look at vv. 23-30. Notice also 12:9-10.

Are you familiar with Joni Eareckson Tada? She is an artist, an author, a speaker, and even a singer. When she was 17, the summer before she was to go to college, she went to Chesapeake Bay with her sister. She dove off of the raft on which they had been floating. She did not know that the water was shallow. When she dove in, her head struck hard on the floor of the bay, and it snapped the spinal column in her neck. She has been in a wheel chair for almost 54 years. She's a quadriplegic.

When the doctors told this 17-year-old that she would never walk again, she fell into a deep depression. She was suicidal, but how does a fully paralyzed person take her life? She wallowed in self-pity for some time, but then she prayed. Joni reported, "I prayed one short prayer that changed my life: 'Oh God, if I can't die, show me how to live.' That was probably the most powerful prayer I had ever prayed."

In time, Joni accepted that God's will for her life included a wheelchair. She began to understand that God could accomplish more through her weakness than through her wholeness. God's power has been made perfect in her weakness. In the last 50+ years, she has written 48 books and recorded award-winning songs. Those, along with her artwork, her speaking, and her ministry organization has touched the lives of millions of people. Confined to a wheelchair, with no physical strength, she has changed the world. God's grace has been enough for Joni, but she's had to appropriate that grace every, single day.

God can do far more through our weakness than He would ever be able to do through our strength. It is through our suffering that we are made weak, and that is when God shows up in His strength.

Notice the end point of this suffering. Look at the final words of v. 10: *becoming like Him in His death*. Are you willing to suffer to the point of death? That can be either physical death or figurative death. Are you willing to die to your plans, your dreams, and your self-governed life?

In what way, exactly, are we to be like Jesus? Go back one chapter to Philippians 2:8. If we are to be like Christ, two things are required—humility and obedience. The humble person refuses to insist on doing it his way while the obedient person insists on doing it God's way.

It is those who know Christ, it is those who experience Him who learn to turn from their way to God's way. Commenting on this verse, James Boice wrote, "If we are to know Him, really know Him, we must obey Him completely."

Lord, help us to obey you completely.

When We Experience Christ, We Will Live the Resurrection Life Today

Look at v. 11. Bible teachers are divided on what Paul means in this verse. Is Paul referring to the resurrection that will come when Jesus returns? Borrowing again from Boice, I like his take on what Paul meant. Let me read what he wrote:

[Paul] knows that God will bring him safely to heaven. Paul is not thinking in these terms; he is thinking about something else. Actually, he is saying that he wishes to be so much like Christ in the way he lived that people would think of him as a resurrected person even now, even before his physical death.

Boice argues for his interpretation by noting something interesting that Paul does. Paul uses a word that shows up only one time in the NT, and it is right there in v. 11. He takes the word *resurrection* and adds a prefix to it. That prefix he adds corresponds to our word *out*. Some people believe that Paul is the one who coined this word, that he just made it up. I don't know if that is the case or not. What does Paul mean by the word *out-resurrection*?

It is helpful to know what *resurrection* literally meant. It means *to stand up*. In the Greek way of thinking, those who were dead were lying down. Those who had been resurrected were no longer lying down; they were standing.

What Paul is getting at is that he wants to live his life in such a way that he is the one standing out among all those who are still lying down.

Are you standing out from the crowd? Is it clear to others that there is something fundamentally different about you? In a world that is lying down spiritually, are you standing out from the crowd because Jesus is living His resurrected life in and through you?

As we close, let me return one more time to Joni Eareckson Tada. Joni tells the story of being in a ladies' restroom during a Christian women's conference. A well-meaning woman, who was putting on lipstick in front of the mirror, said to her, "Oh, Joni, you always look so together, so happy in your wheelchair. I wish I had your joy!" There were several women present. They nodded and asked, "Yes, how do you do it?" Joni answered:

I don't do it. Let me tell you how it works. After my husband, Ken, leaves for work at 6:00 am, I'm alone until I hear the front door open at 7:00 am. That's when a friend arrives to get me up. While I listen to her make coffee, I pray, "Oh, Lord, my friend will soon give me a bath, dress me, sit me up in a chair, brush my hair and teeth, and send me out the door. I don't have the strength to face this routine one more time. I have no resources. I don't even have a smile to take into the day. But you do, Lord. May I have yours? God, I need you desperately."

One of the women asked, "So, what happens then, when your friend comes through the bedroom door?"

Joni replied, "I turn my head toward her and give her a smile sent straight from

heaven. It's not mine. It's God's. And so, whatever joy you see today was hard won this morning."

If there is going to be any victory in your life, if it is going to become apparent that you are living the resurrection life now, it will come by you and I experiencing daily the One who said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

What do you want to do when I grow up? I want to grow me you up and me up so that we can live the resurrection life.