

4.1.26 am

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Date: 04 January 2026

Preacher: Stuart King

[0 : 00] Well good morning everyone, it's good to see so many here actually considering the weather, I thought it was going to be just myself preaching to the family but it's good to see everyone here. And just in terms of intimations, hopefully you've managed to see some of them come through, wishing everyone a happy new year first of all.

But there'll be hopefully tea and coffee, I think I smelled coffee on the way in, so there'll be tea and coffee served just after the service if you're able to stay. It would be good to stay back and have a little bit of time of fellowship together.

The evening service will be at 6 o'clock this evening in the church building, all being well, and that will be taken by Kiki. And we ask that he'll be blessed in his preparations for this evening. And then I think all other intimations, I think we're starting to get back to normal again for the week. So the usual clubs will be on little fishes, the prayer meeting on Wednesday again, we'll be encouraged to come along to that.

There's no Friday clubs this coming Friday but they will start again the following Friday and so will YF as well. So some of the older ones can take note of that. But we'll begin our time of public worship today by singing from Psalm 63 from the Scottish Psalter.

[1 : 09] Psalm 63 from the Scottish Psalter and we'll sing the first eight verses of the Psalm. Lord thee my God, I'll early seek, my soul doth thirst for thee.

My flesh longs in a dry parched land wherein no waters be. That I thy power may behold and brightness of thy face, as I have seen thee heretofore within thy holy place. Since better is thy love than life, my lips thee praise shall give.

I in thy name will lift my hands and bless thee while I live. Even as with marrow and with fat my soul shall fill it be. Then shall my mouth with joyful lips sing praises unto thee.

When I do thee upon my bed, remember with delight. And when on thee I meditate in watches of the night. In shadow of thy wings I'll joy. For thou mine help hast been. My soul thee follows hard on me.

Thou right hand doth sustain. So we'll sing these verses, verses 1 to 8 of Psalm 63. And we'll stand to sing to God's praise. Lord, be my Lord, I'll early seek, my soul doth thirst for thee.

[2 : 23] My flesh long sin, that I far stand, where in no waters be.

That I thy power may behold, and brightness of thy face.

As I have seen thee here to pour, within thy holy face.

Since betterness I love and life. My lips thee this shall give.

I end thy name. Where live my hands. And bless thee while I live.

[3 : 51] In us with my heart. And with heart. My soul shall fill at thee.

Then shall my heart. With joyfulness sing graces unto thee.

When I do thee upon my bed. Remember with delight.

And when on thee I meditate. In watches of the night.

In shadow of thy wings I enjoy. For love my help has been.

[5 : 19] My soul devolves heart on me. Thy right hand doth sustain.

Let's join together in prayer. Let's pray. Gracious and ever-blessed Father, Lord, we give you thanks that we find ourselves here in your house.

We thank you, Lord, that when we come before you and we sing worship and praise to your most holy name. We are coming before a gracious and a merciful God.

A God that is just. A God that is loving. And a God that desires us to come to him. So we ask, Lord, and ask even at the beginning of a new year that we remember to turn to you in all that we do.

That we would recognize that you are not a God that's distant. You're not a God that's far from us. But you're one that desires for us to come to you. So we pray, Lord, that we would start a new year in a way that we seek to continue the new year.

[6 : 40] That we would be turning to you in all things. In times of difficulty. In times of joy. In times of joy. That you would indeed be our refuge. In all things. In all things. We thank you, Lord, that when we look to you and we see that love.

We see it so clearly and evidently in the sending of your only son. We give you thanks for that gift. That gift that we thought of. Each and every day.

But especially over these last couple of weeks. We think of the birth of your son. We thank you for that gift. We thank you that it is indeed a gift. You don't ask anything of us.

You don't ask us to reach a certain level of status. You don't ask us to complete a number of tasks. Or to attend a set number of church services. But all that we are asked to do is to take the gift.

And give thanks for the gift. So we pray that we would indeed do that this very day, Lord. For those who have not done so. We pray, Lord, for those who are unable to be with us.

[7 : 39] Be that through the weather. We give you thanks that we have opportunities to share your word online. And that option is there for those who are unable to make it with us. But we pray for those who, if the weather was fine, would still be unable to be with us.

Be that through illness. Maybe being in hospital or being housebound. We pray for them, Lord. We ask that you would be with them. That you would comfort them. That you would lay your healing hands upon them.

And we especially bring before you those who are maybe going through treatment at this time.

Those who are going through various investigations at this time as well, Lord. And an anxious time.

We pray that you would indeed be with them. That you would be that comforter to them. We especially think of, again, young Lydia. Who has had to spend Christmas and New Year in hospital, Lord.

We pray that you would continue to be with her and the family, Lord. That you would be with those who are looking after her. That you would grant them wisdom and precision in all that they do.

[8 : 38] And how they seek to treat her over these weeks and months ahead, Lord. We pray that you would be with her as well, Lord. And that you would be with the family. And that they would indeed take comfort from you during this very difficult time, Lord.

We think of those, especially, Lord, who today, not through reasons of the weather, but reasons of choice. Have chosen not to be here. Those who have no desire to come into your house.

Those who wake up each and every day with no thought of you. We ask, Lord, that you would minister to them. That you would speak to them. That you would make yourself known to them.

That you would reveal to them the sin in their own lives.

Reveal to them that need of a saviour. That they cannot do it in and of themselves. There is nothing they can do to save themselves.

But to bend the knee. To ask for mercy. And to repent of the sins in their lives, Lord. So we pray that you would indeed reveal yourself to them in order that they would do that.

[9 : 41] And that they would find themselves in your house. Hearing your word being preached. Wherever Christ crucified is preached, Lord. We pray that they would indeed be there. And that they would be able to be encouraged by your word.

To be strengthened by it. And to be ultimately transformed by it, Lord. We pray for our congregation. We pray for all the intimations. We give you thanks for them.

But apart from you, none of these things would be done. We pray for the work of the youth. We pray for the younger ones and the older ones. We give you thanks that we have these opportunities to open the doors of this building.

To be able to share the gospel with the community around us. And we ask, Lord, that we would have more opportunities ahead in 2026. To be able to minister to others in the community.

To share that glorious gospel message, Lord. We pray for our road to recovery. We pray for all those who are dealing with addiction at this time. Especially difficult time of year, Lord. We ask that you would indeed be with them.

[10 : 40] That you would, again, minister to them at their point of their need, Lord. You know them better than any one of us. And we ask that you would give us opportunities to minister to them.

To encourage them. To pray with them. And to share our word in season with them. And we pray as well for those that we've not been able to have coming to your house here, Lord.

We pray for those who are in the community. Those that are lost. Those that are heading to a lost eternity. We pray, Lord, that you would give us the opportunity to speak to them.

That you would give us the opportunity to share even our own testimonies. Those of us that have one. That we would always be ready to share the hope that is within us. And that it is indeed a hope.

That there is a joy to come. That there is a joy in eternity in fellowship with you. So we pray, Lord, that you would grant us those opportunities to share the word.

[11 : 38] But you would also grant us a courage and a boldness to take the multitude of opportunities that already present themselves each and every day to us. And don't let fear or fear of embarrassment or whatever it may be, be something that is a blocker or a barrier to us in sharing the gospel, Lord.

But that you would go before us in all things. And that you would be around us and that you would be keeping us and protecting us from all that the devil seeks to do.

That we don't just casually hear the words, but that we are intently listening. That we are desiring to know more. That we are desiring to grow in our knowledge of you. And ultimately to draw nearer to you.

That our hearts of stone. Those hearts that are not always receptive to your word and what it tells us. But that it would indeed be turned into a heart of flesh. And that we would be able to see many more seats being laid out in your building here, Lord.

That we would be able to have that wonderful problem of being too small as we seek to minister to those around us, Lord. But we ask that you would be with us this day, this morning. That you would grant us a blessing.

[13 : 17] And that we would be able to grow more in our understanding of you as we seek to open up your word, Lord. So be with us just now. Forgive us for all of our sins. In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Well boys and girls.

I meant to say that there is actually a Sunday school after the second singing for primary only. So I'll be keeping an eye on some of the secondary ones of the chance that we run out. I won't name names, but I know who you are.

So yeah, some of the younger ones, if you want to come to the front. Some of the primary ones, if you want to come down. I need you to physically help me with this one. So I'm not going to let you stay in your chairs today.

Come and have a wee seat at the front here. I'm going to need a helper today. Now full disclosure, this children's address is one that I actually saw online a number of years ago.

But it actually fits in quite well with the passage today. So I'll be sharing it with the young ones. How are you? There's not that many of you. I'll maybe use all of you for this one. Did you have a good Christmas and New Year?

[14 : 15] Yeah? Are you looking forward to school in Scolari? That wasn't very clear. Yes. I know the parents are, so we're longing for that day. Right, now what is this?

Can anyone tell me what this looks like? Nobody? It's string. It's actually wool, but yeah, same idea. Now I need a helper. Who wants to help? I need one person.

Do you want to help? Okay, I want you to take this string. Maybe another person can help you.

Does anyone else want to help? Maybe all of you. Just hold the string. I want you to just keep walking.

Walk around the church for me. Go that way. I hope it's long enough. Just keep going. Just walk together around the church. Don't worry, you'll come back. Just keep on going. Oh, Jings.

I'll just go. Keep going, keep going. Right round, right round. Go as far as you can. Don't stop. Keep going.

[15 : 11] If it breaks, we've got a problem, but keep going. Right, right round. Keep going. Oh, that says long. That's good. Keep going. I know our man's been working on health and safety policies, but don't worry.

Right, we've tightened up. That'll do, that'll do. Don't want it to break. So, you can come back now. Just leave it, drop it, just drop it, and come back. A wee bit tangled, but we'll just do this.

We'll bring it back here. So, you come back. What I want you to do is, I want you to imagine that this bit of string keeps going on and on. Oh, thank you. That's good.

So, I want you to imagine. Have a wee seat. I want you to think. Imagine this string just keeps going on and on and on and on and on, and it never stops. It goes on for the whole of eternity.

And it reminded me, and this lesson that I saw, it reminds us of our life. So, we've got eternity ahead of us. So, after we leave this world, we've got this long, long string of eternity.

[16:15] But this little bit of it here, so the end of the string, can you see this, guys? See this end of the string? This, what colour is it? Purple, pink, I think it's pink.

My eyes maybe need checked. But this bit here, imagine that this part is your life here on Earth. And this is the same for all of us. We spend so much of our time thinking about everything in this part of our life.

We are born here at the beginning, and then we maybe worry about things. Maybe we worry about school. Maybe we've just had a lovely present for Christmas, and you already want the next one. Maybe some of these older ones, we'll not say how old, they've worked their lives so far along here, they work so hard, so they can spend a wee bit of time here travelling and going on holiday. But nobody ever thinks about... Let go of the string! Let go, let go, guys! Let go! Let go! Caught a fish! Okay, nobody ever thinks about this long bit.

All we're doing is spending time thinking about this part of our life. Just keep it there. I'll pull it in, don't worry. So we all sit and worry about little things that are happening here, but we're too busy that we don't ever think about the rest of eternity.

[17:27] And the passage that we're going to be looking at later on reminds us that we shouldn't be looking at everything that's happening in our world here, but that we should always be looking towards eternity.

We can all get caught up in the little things that are happening in our life here. So much so that we forget and we think this is all that we have to live for. The first catechism tells us our chief end or our main goal in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Not for a couple of days, not for just a few years, but we enjoy Him forever. So what I want you to do is to remember, you listening guys, remember, this life that you have, it's going to be so short. Even if you live to be as old as some of the oldest people in the congregation, it's still going to be so small in comparison to the rest of eternity. So I want you to remember the world that you're living in. I want you to focus your eyes. See you in this next year, Anna. See you in this next year. That's around your ear, isn't it? Sorry. This next year, I want you to think not just about what's happening in your own lives, but I want you to think about even past our lives.

[18:37] I want us to live lives that are focusing on Jesus and that they focus on everything that He has for us and that we remember that we have an eternal destination. This life will be full of fun.

It will be full of sadness. But see all of this white. If we trust in Jesus, this whole time, millions and millions of years, will be nothing but good. There will be no sadness.

There will be no tears. There will be no times you're ever upset. It is all perfect with God. So I want us to make sure that we're striving for that. And when we focus a little bit later on with the older ones, we're thinking about running a race.

And we should be pressing on towards our prize. And that prize isn't something lovely here. It isn't a PS5 or a new piece of gadgetry. It's not a new house.

It's not a new promotion. It's none of these things. It is this long bit that keeps going on forever and ever. So we'll say a wee word of prayer. You close your eyes, hands together, and we'll just say a short word of prayer before we sing the next singing.

[19:40] Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, we give you thanks that we are able to speak to the young ones here, Lord, and that we are able to share the words from your word, the words that show us that there is indeed an eternity ahead of us, that we don't need to fear or worry about the things in this life.

But when we look at that rope, and although it's even a poor illustration, Lord, we know that that rope continues on forever and forever, and that what we do in this life will determine what that string looks like.

Will it be an eternity that is lost, or an eternity that is filled with joy, filled with happiness, filled with glory as we sit with you in eternity, Lord? So we pray for the young ones and ask that they would indeed turn to you in the days of their youth.

We give you thanks for Sunday school teachers. We thank you that they share your word so diligently with them, and pray that the young ones would have a nice time as well today as they go to holiday Sunday school, Lord.

So bless them and keep them, and forgive all of us for all of our sins. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, we'll sing this time from Mission Praise 712, 712.

[20 : 52] And it's really again, like we said to the young ones, and as we will hopefully look at slightly later on, turning our eyes upon Jesus is what we ought to do. So, O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see.

There's light for the look at the Saviour, and life more abundant and free. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

So we'll sing the whole of this hymn, 712, and we'll stand to sing to God's praise. You guys stand. O soul, are you weary and troubled? No light in the darkness you see.

There's light for a look at the Saviour, and life more abundant and free. and unfree. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face.

[22 : 15] How the days of earth will grow strange again in the light of his glory and grace.

Through death and into life everlasting, he passes and we follow him there.

O does it no more have dominion for more than comfort beyond?

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face.

And the things of earth will grow strange again in the light of his glory and grace.

[23 : 16] His words shall not fail you, he promised. Believe him and all will be well.

Then go to a world that is dying, his perfect salvation to turn.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face.

And the things of earth were most strange again in the light of his glory and grace.

And the young ones, leave us. If you have one, to Philipians chapter 3.

[24 : 20] Philipians chapter 3 and we'll just read the whole of the chapter.

This is God's word and the title of the chapter I have in the ESV is Righteousness Through Faith in Christ. It says, Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. 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 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

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.

[25 : 38] 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. Not that I have already obtained this, or I'm 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, 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.

[26 : 40] Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Brothers, join in imitating me. And keep your eyes on those who walk, according to the example you have in us. For many of whom I have often told you, and now tell you, even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly. And they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And from it we await a saviour, the Lord Jesus

Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body.

By the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Amen. And may the Lord bless that reading of his own holy word.

We'll now sing this time in Gaelic. And we remain seated to sing in Gaelic from Psalm 84. The first two stanzas of Psalm 84. And I'll read them in English. How lovely is thy dwelling place.

O Lord of hosts to me. The tabernacles of thy grace. How pleasant, Lord, they be. My thirsty soul longs vehemently. Ye faints thy courts to see.

[27 : 49] My very heart and flesh cry out. O living God for thee. So we'll sing these verses of Psalm 84, verses 1 and 2 in Gaelic. And as I say, we remain seated to sing to God's praise. Thank you.

O Lord of hosts to sing to God's praise.

O Lord of hosts to sing to God's praise.

O Lord of hosts to sing to God's praise.

as Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

[30 : 16] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

[31 : 22] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

the persecuted church on all corners of your vineyard and ask that you would indeed be with them this very day, that they would indeed be comforted knowing that even where two or three are gathered, they are promised that your presence is with them, Lord. So we pray for them, we give you thanks for the word and grant us more opportunities to be able to share that word with all those around us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Well if you could just turn back or have your Bibles open in Philippians chapter 3. I want us to take our text from verses 12 through 14 this morning and I'm just conscious that we find ourselves here four days into a new year. The calendar has turned and that natural moment has come where we often reflect, people will maybe make resolutions. I'm not going to ask any of you to put your hands up but I wonder how many of you made a resolution four days ago and it's already gone to pot and you've already failed. But we so often find the first part of the year, tail end of one year, looking back at that previous year and the beginning of a new year looking forward. What lies ahead for us? And that's maybe a question we're all asking ourselves and even as I reflect back at the beginning of last year as a family, I don't think we would have expected that 2026 would see us awaiting the outcome of applying for going into ministry. So we don't know what's ahead of us but we do know, although we have an unknown future, I think it's Corrie Ten Boom says, although we have an unknown future, we are grateful that we have a known God. But God willing, there will be an exciting and encouraging path ahead for you. And you don't have to look too far online or in a newspaper to see lots of different articles, lots of different stories where people are looking forward into 2026 or making predictions. And I read one BBC article, this was on, well I was at work, it was lunchtime, I'll say that because we're being recorded. I was looking at a BBC article and it was about food trends for the coming year and there were six of them, I'm not going to go through all six of them, but I'm just going to mention a couple of them just to see if either you've heard of it. And if not, this can be the first place that you've heard of these trends. But one thing that they said is going to be coming up in 2026 is that there's going to be fricy flavours. I won't ask for anyone's suggestions of what fricy means, I'll tell you. It means fruit and spicy, so there's going to be fruit and spicy mixes apparently in the year ahead for food. And then cabbage, and I'm going to use a quote here, they say cabbage is having a moment this time of the year. So I do like cabbage, so it's never not had a moment for us. But apparently cabbage is going to be one of those things. But the main reason I want to share that is we are obsessed with looking forward, we're obsessed with predicting what's going to be happening.

We read these articles, what's going to be the next trend this year. And the past year is now behind us with its sorrows, its disappointments, its failures. They are now written in a book that is closed and ahead of us effectively lies a clean slate. Now this new year ahead of us stretches before us and it's full of potential of God's grace in your life. Yeah I know for many of us as we're speaking to the young ones and as we will today, thinking of this race that is being run, the starting line of our new year can feel daunting. The race of the Christian life is not a short sprint, it's a marathon. It's

filled with hurdles, it will be filled with weariness and there will be moments when we're tempted to give up. Now I don't look like it and I'll see by your faces if you agree but in my younger days I used to be quite athletic. You can see some smells, my brother just coughed. I'm glad that they're both here because they'll be able to confirm if you want to ask them afterwards. I did used to be, I used to be a good runner and football as well but I remember doing some cross-country running. I remember your legs would be aching and you'd be desperate for it to stop. Legs aching, lungs were burning, starting to get a stitch. Not had one of them for a long time but I remember there was this one particular race in school that we were doing in the kind of school championship and I was very close to coming to the end. It was a four by four hundred and I was on the last leg and we were about to win but I remember hearing from the side the three other runners saying to me, you can do it, keep on going, we're almost there. And that simple bit of encouragement was enough to help us to finish. I won't say where we came because it wasn't first but that simple encouragement was all it needed for us and for me at that moment in the final leg to be able to continue that run. And this morning I would want the passage here to be that friend to you, to be that encouragement that you have at the beginning of a new year as we continue on in a spiritual race or maybe it's very early in your spiritual race. Whether you feel strong and steady on this race or whether you are stumbling or you feel tempted to quit, I want this passage to be something that will be of encouragement to us all. So as I said, verses 12 to 14, I'll just read them just now. This is Paul saying, 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, 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. And the purpose of our time together here is to encourage one another, to encourage one another to resolve by God's grace to press on in this race. So as we all stand here at the start of our new year or metaphorically at the start of another year, another starting line, what is it that you're focused on? Are you looking back in regret at the last year or something that's happened or even years before? Are you looking back in complacency or are you like a runner ready for the signal, leaning forward with your eyes fixed on the prize? Just like we spoke to the young ones. Are we focusing just on everything that's happening in our life or are we looking forward to the prize ahead? But to run effectively, we first must adopt a runner's mindset. And there's three points I really want us to focus on. The first of which is Paul's confession. We see here Paul's confession, or we can call it the runner's confession. And he says here, I have not yet arrived effectively. He's saying, before we can effectively press forward, we must first adopt an honest, humble self-assessment that we see here from Paul.

[38 : 44] True progress in the Christian race begins not with declaring strength, speed, or pace that we have, but with a confession of need. It begins with the words, I have not yet arrived. In verses 12 and 13, Paul makes this abundantly clear. He says, not that I have already obtained or am already perfect.

I do not consider that I've made it my own. There's a clear confession there. And it's a staggering admission from the apostle Paul, who was a spiritual giant, who'd planted churches, who'd suffered immensely for the gospel and received direct revelations from Christ. Even Paul, a mature saint, recognised that he still had room for growth. He knew that perfection was not something attainable in this life. And it's fascinating to note that the two words that he uses here for perfect in the Greek are two different types of words. So in verse 12, when he says he's not already perfect, perfect, he speaks of an absolute flawless completion. He's not perfect. He will not be perfect. Yet in verse 15, if you have the authorised version, you'll see another use of the word perfect, where he says, let us therefore as many as to be perfect be thus minded. But here for the word perfect is not about that absolute flawless completion. It's more of a maturity, which the ESV has. So in the ESV in verse 15, it says, let those of us who are mature think this way.

And there is a profound distinction in those two different uses of the word. In other words, Paul is saying mature Christians are flawless. He isn't saying, sorry, mature Christians are flawless. He's saying mature Christians are the ones who know they aren't flawless and therefore are never stopping in running this race. So if you're perfect, you'll know that you're not perfect. So if you're mature, you will know you're not perfect. As one of the scholars states, Paul says that he has not come to the place in the Christian life where growth and spiritual maturity has been completed, beyond which there is no room for further development. Another one states that the critical point here is that no person achieves perfection on this earth. Yet they go on to say too many are so

narrow in their thinking that they seldom ever grasp what perfection really means. And they go on to give an example. He says, consider the brain and your mind. It's been estimated that man uses only one tenth of one percent of their mental capacity. Just imagine how far short we are of perfection. And then they say, consider the body. What would a perfect body be like? It's a body that never desired, never thought or did wrong, never came up short, never ages, never deteriorates, never dies or decays.

There is no question that Paul was one of the most remarkable people in history. But if even someone as great as him was not perfect, it shows us just how far short we fall and how much more room there is for improvement in our own lives. This honest confession of nobody, it's a soft pillow for the hypocrite to rest on, excusing their sins. Rather, it's for the true child of God, it should be a dagger to the heart. The recognition of our own imperfection ought to give us and ought to grieve us. It should give us a holy and passionate desire to be more like our Saviour.

[42 : 22] And it's in this humble confession of our present imperfection that becomes the essential prerequisite for our next crucial action. And our next point is then Paul's focus. So what is it that Paul focuses on? We see his confession. He recognises he's not perfect. He recognises that in this life, he never will be perfect. So what does he then focus on? Well, we see there he focuses on forgetting what lies behind. In the middle of verse 13 there, it says, but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. Now, I'm no longer a runner, as you can tell, but I know many in the congregation are. And you'll agree that a runner's focus is critical.

Focusing on where you're going, even to the silly things on a day like this, watching where your feet are going, watching what you're stepping on, watching what you're not stepping on. Your focus is critical. You should imagine a sprinter that is constantly looking over their shoulder behind. What would happen? I'm sure the runners in their minds are saying, well, they would probably stumble. They would maybe veer off to the side. Maybe they would lose speed because they're looking back. They would slow down their pace, maybe subconsciously. Perhaps they would maybe lose the race entirely.

And that's why the Apostle Paul here makes this non-negotiable in our lives. But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind. This is not a suggestion. It's not something that you ought, that he thinks you might find helpful to you. It's an imperative and it's a core discipline for making forward progress in the Christian life. But what is it we must forget? What is it that Paul is telling us here we ought to forget? Well, in essence, it involves really two kinds, well, releasing two kinds of baggage in our lives. First is the weight of our past failures. We have to release the weight of our past failures, but also to release the complacency of our past victories, not forgetting those victories as well. So firstly, just looking at very briefly, releasing of our, the weight of past failures. Past sins, be them in the last week, in the last few years, in the last couple of decades, they have a way of haunting us, almost paralyzing sometimes our progress in the race.

And one writer shared a story in their book. It was of a friend of theirs who was a faithful Christian friend, but they had fallen so terribly. They didn't go into the details of how, but they had fallen so terribly. Years later, though, this Christian friend of theirs was repentant, had been forgiven, yet could never seem to move past their sin. He carried the weight of that failure with him every day and it robbed him of a joy and a purpose. His race was not over, but he was running it as if he was carrying an impossible burden. And perhaps that's you today. Perhaps there are sins in your own past that haunt you. They cause you to think, if I could only ever do it over, I would do this differently, or I would do that differently. Well, if you're a believer today, we ought to lay those burdens on Christ and on Christ alone. He carried them on the cross for you. You're not meant to carry them anymore. The Word of God gives us a glorious number of assurances and promises through his Word of that complete and total forgiveness. And we so often need to keep remembering the promises of God.

[45 : 54] Consider these ones. You don't need to go there in your Bible, but I'll just read four passages and what they tell us and how they remind us, how it helps us to forget what lies behind. 1 John 1.9 says, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Psalm 103 verse 12 says, As far as east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

In Micah 7.19, He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

And lastly, Jeremiah 31.34 says, For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. Your heavenly Father has forgotten your sins. He's forgiven those sins. You must too. There is always hope. There is always restoration for the repentant heart. No failure in our lives, in any of your lives, is too great for the grace of God.

So we need to remember that. The second one is about releasing the complacency of past victories. And this is probably a more subtle one. More of a subtle danger in our lives, but we often can be found dwelling on our past accomplishments.

[47 : 16] Just maybe looking back at spiritual successes, maybe there was a fruitful season of ministry. Maybe there was a fruitful activity you were involved in in the past. Maybe there was a victor over a particular sin in your life.

Maybe a solid period of devotion where you were in your Bible and you felt that you were drawing ever closer to God. But that's not the case anymore. That can often sometimes lead us to complacency.

A runner who glances back at the lead that he has built. So we spoke earlier about looking back. The runner looking back may be distracted. But if you're looking back just to see how far ahead you are of everyone else, or how well you've done in the race to get you here, or to begin celebrating too soon even, you'll only then find yourself possibly overtaken at the finish line.

Once again, Paul is our primary example here. In verses 4 to 6, he lists an incredible religious pedigree that he says he had. And I'll just briefly read it.

It says, And in 2 Corinthians 11, he recounts his staggering sufferings for the gospel, his beatings, his imprisonments, shipwreck, and his constant perils.

[48 : 44] If anyone had a right to rest on his laurels, it was Paul. What he shows us in his own assessment is that looking at those achievements is one he ought to not do.

He ought to forget what lies behind both the positive and the negative. And he powerfully declares that he counts it all as rubbish compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, his Lord. Look at verses 7 and 8. He says there, Yesterday's victories are not today's.

We must be thankful for them, but we cannot live in them. Forgetting what lies behind both our failures and our successes is the only way to clear the path for what truly matters.

And this is that all-out sprint toward the prize. And that's really just our final point I want us to close with. Paul's pressing is the final point. So we're pressing toward the goal.

[49 : 58] Forgetting the past is not an end in itself. It's the essential preparation for this main event. It clears the way for this intentional and strenuous action Paul describes in verse 14.

He says, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. This is not just a passive drift towards something.

Just coasting along towards a prize. For some, the Christian life might feel like standing on one of those travelators at the airport. You know, the level travelator.

You're maybe moving, but there's little personal effort. But that's not the picture that is painted here by Paul. The Christian race is an active, diligent, faithful pursuit.

And Paul's language is drawn from the athletic arena. We mentioned earlier about the runner. And he speaks here of a runner straining, effectively straining every muscle.

[50 : 57] Exerting himself with a single focus for that finish line. Just like we spoke with the young ones. Not focusing on the little things that we do here on earth. Focusing on the finish line and eternity with the Lord ahead.

In verse 12, when he says, He presses on to make it my own. This prize, he uses the Greek word katalambano. Probably butchered that, so apologies.

But this is the Greek translation of this. It's not just a gentle grasp. It's not something that you'll just grab as you go by. It's an aggressive seizure. And a good illustration of it is maybe just, if any of you are rugby fans and you watch the rugby.

If you watch a player chasing down the other player with the ball. You see them pursuing his opponent. He's in a full sprint. He's not jogging towards the person with the ball.

He's pursuing him in a sprint. And when he finally reaches him, he doesn't just tap him. He doesn't just grab his shirt. He tackles him. Grabbing hold of him. With every effort, trying to take him down.

[51 : 59] And it's with this intensity with which we are to pursue the very purpose for which Christ has laid hold of us. This is a race that requires exertion.

It requires endurance. And it requires a strong will. It's a demanding pursuit. It requires every ounce of our spiritual energy. And what could possibly motivate such a strenuous effort?

And it's only a prize that is of infinite worth. On Wednesday evening, Amman was at the prayer meeting. Amman spoke of this inheritance and how that inheritance is in heaven.

It's held in heaven. Heaven holds a treasure that belongs solely to us. Kept under God's own protection. We are currently on a brief assignment here.

Just like that illustration with the young ones. The time here is so short and so fleeting. Once our work here is finalised, we will step into the presence of the Father. To claim what he has so carefully preserved for us.

[53 : 02] Every runner ought to be motivated by the prize. For the believer, the prize is described as the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

This is a heavenly call from heaven. Throwing us toward heaven. Where Christ himself waits. But what exactly is the prize that we are straining for?

And scripture defines it perfectly for us. And it's a glorious multifaceted goal. And I'll just pick up on three parts of this prize. The first part of this goal is a goal of conformity.

Romans 8.29 tells us that. That the ultimate purpose of our salvation is to be made into the likeness of Christ. There's then the goal of perfection. It's the attainment of the resurrection where we will finally be made complete.

And experience total freedom from sin. And that perfection was said so clearly by Angus M on Wednesday. At the New Year's Day service.

[54 : 06] He also spoke of the third point. There's the goal of fellowship. So there's that perfection. And Angus M also spoke of that perfect fellowship. And Paul tells us here in verse 8 that his deepest desire was to gain Christ.

Very important words. To gain Christ. To know him in a perfect unhindered fellowship that is only hinted at in this life. Ultimately the prize is not a place but a person.

The prize is Christ himself. To know him perfectly. To be with him forever. To be completely like him is the goal. That is the prize that makes this race worth running.

Understanding the prize moves us from knowledge though to action. And it provides us with a clear purpose for the year ahead. If God has such a clear and glorious purpose for your salvation.

That you might gain Christ. Then it's ungodly for us to live an aimless life. We ought to enter into this year. Recognizing that this is the goal that we ought to be striving for.

[55 : 14] Don't drift this coming year. Let us resolve today. Even this very hour. To run with purpose. Don't just think of those same old resolutions that we come up with each and every year.

That we'll walk more. We'll diet more. We'll... I don't know what else it might be. There are two that just came to my mind. I don't know why. But don't just think of these resolutions that we just turn out every year.

And we always fail on. The great American theologian Jonathan Edwards. Many of you may have read his works. But he wrote 70 resolutions. And I would encourage you. They're available on Google.

If you want to just Google Jonathan Edwards resolutions. He wrote these when he was 20. And I'll not go through all of them. But there's one that I've used a few times in various different services. They're all very rich.

And as I say I would urge you to look at them. But there's a very challenging one. Just when we think about that illustration with the young ones. What our focus. What our mind is on. I think this resolution. Albeit challenging.

[56 : 16] Is one that I think we ought to take away. But Jonathan Edwards said that he resolved never to do anything. Which I should be afraid to do. If it were the last hour of my life.

He resolved never to do anything. Which I should be afraid to do. If it were the last hour of my life. So going back to the young ones. When we had that purple bit at the end of the rope.

And this infinite piece of rope that continued on into eternity. We so often get embroiled in what happens in our own lives. And if we are living our life in a way that we wouldn't.

If we knew it was the last hour. We ought to check ourselves from that. Even as I was. I'll not name who it was. But a couple of people that I worked with. When I explained to them that we were applying to go into ministry.

And hopefully God willing be leaving my current employment. Remember when I'm saying to me. Oh that's such a shame. What a waste. What a waste of all the work you've done. Your qualification.

[57 : 14] And all the work you do in mediation. What a waste. And realistically. What a waste that you're spending time on these things. When you have this whole eternity ahead of you. It is not a waste.

And I think that's a really challenging one. If we were to think. Whatever we're doing at any moment. If this was the last hour of your life. Would you be doing it? I think 99.9% of the time. And I speak to myself first. It would not be things that I would do.

If I knew it was the last hour. But to help us. Just as we come to a close. To help us. To run with purpose. I want to offer five practical resolutions. Really drawn from God's word.

Five ways that we can actively press towards. The mark in the year ahead. The first one is to resolve to be teachable. The psalmist himself prayed a number of times in Psalm 119.

Teach me thy statutes. Let your prayer for this year be. Teach me O Lord. The way of your statutes. A person who is not teachable. Will never become what God desires them to be.

[58 : 15] So we ought to be teachable. The second one is that I would resolve. We ought to resolve to turn. We must turn from some things. But we also must turn to other things.

And I would ask that we would resolve to turn. From the wisdom of the world. The ways of the world. The words of the world. And all the wants and desires of the world. But that we would turn to the Lord.

Let's turn to the word of God. To a life of holiness. To humble prayer. As we're invited to in 2 Chronicles 7.14. Where it says, If my people who are called by my name.

Humble themselves. And pray and seek my face. And turn from their wicked ways. Then I will hear from heaven. And will forgive their sin. And heal their land.

The third thing to do. Is that we ought to resolve. To lay up our treasures in heaven. Jesus commanded us in Matthew 6.20. Lay up your treasures in heaven.

[59 : 13] For neither moth. Where neither moth nor rust destroy. And where thieves do not break in and steal. And it's a question for yourselves. What is your treasure?

What is it in your day to day that you treasure? Is it your hobby? Is it your career? Is it the continued increase in your bank account? Is it the cars you have?

Is it the houses you have? I would ask that we would all resolve this year. To invest our time and energy. Into the things of eternal value. Just think again to that illustration of the young ones.

The efforts that we are putting into this small time. What do they do? Where are we laying those treasures up? Are they just in that short purple bit of the string? Or are we laying up treasures in heaven?

Are we seeking to do God's will here on earth? And the fourth and final one. I want us all, including myself, to resolve to be thankful. Psalm 100 verse 4 urges us. It says, Enter his gates with thanksgiving.

[60 : 09] And his courts with praise. Give thanks to him. Bless his name. A thankful heart has no time to complain. A heart focused on God's blessing.

Is a heart postured for progress. And I urge us all to apply that directly to our lives. For the younger ones among us. This means working diligently in your school work.

Or your university work. Or obeying your parents. Hear that latter one. For the adults among us. It means applying that same diligence to your specific callings. Whether that's in your home.

Your workplace. Or by using your unique gifts. To God's glory. In the coming year. And maybe for those who are not yet believers. In this building and online.

While you may feel like you're standing at a daunting starting line. Maybe burdened by that perceived closed book of past failures. There is a profound hope found in God's unceasing grace.

[61 : 04] The message of this passage. Is that the ultimate prize. In life. Is not a reward for the perfect. But it's a relationship with Christ.

He is a prize of infinite worth. Who offers total restoration. To any repentant heart. Ensuring no past failure. Is too great.

For his unabounding grace. To move from an aimless life. To one of glorious purpose. You're invited to lay your burdens on him.

