

Pondering Christ in Philippians

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Well, hello, and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We are having a conversation about the Word of the Lord, as it was preached to us on Sundays, and as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

My name is Jack, I'm here with Jono, Tristan, and Ben.

I hope we're all doing well this morning.

Yeah, doing well.

Yeah, great.

Excellent, excellent. And today, we are pondering on Ben's sermon, Christ in Philippians. Now, Ben, you want to give us an overview of that sermon?

Sure thing.

So we are 20 messages into our 66 sermon project, the Christ in Scripture project. And I really feel that Philippians is one of the great Christ books in the entire Bible.

And so in the message yesterday, we looked at the passage in chapter 3, where Paul talks about, whatever gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

And we looked at that passage through the lens of desire, which is the question of what it is that human beings want. Paul kind of lists everything that a first century Jew could possibly want. Paul's from the right family, right ritual practices.

He's a Pharisee, he's zealous. But then he pivots and says, all those things I consider loss compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. We looked at that passage through the lens of the three stages of desire.

Firstly, I want, just the human fact that we want. Paul wants, I want. And then in the second section, I want Christ, the realization that Christ is actually what I want above all things.

But then Paul ends by suggesting that I want to want Christ. Paul says that I have not already obtained this, and he's referring to the knowledge of Christ Jesus. I've not obtained it, but I press on to know him more.

And so we looked at what it means for us to want Christ, and even to want to want Christ, how it is that the heart desires different things, and what practices we can do.

Yeah, I always love when we're in Philippians. It's just such a punchy Christ focused book. Reflections from you, Jono and Tristan, coming out of the sermon?

Yeah, what really hit home for me was your point about cultivating a deeper desire for God, especially in today's age where there's so quick to get answers and you touched on AI for a second.

And I think what I found most powerful for me, especially the start of this year, starting Bible College, is that now I have this renewed sense, it feels like I have a renewed sense of having a deeper desire for what God is actually saying in the

text, rather than what I grew up on or what we did in past sermon series or my own devotion. It's about looking deeper. So that point really hit home about, oh, there's power in the curiosity there, that feeds into that desire. So that was cool.

Yeah, I thought it was a great message.

It's an amazing book. I like the idea of the war of wants, which reminded me of 1 Peter. I urge you as foreigners and exiles to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

Yeah, so that was a great reminder about Christ being the great solution to our human desire.

The war of wants thing is interesting. The FIFA World Cup was this morning at 5 a.m. And there's been all the controversy about which companies can advertise according to FIFA's rules.

But you look at the, I was looking, watching the game this morning, from one frame, there's like 15 companies advertising. Like I made the point that sociologists have counted, that we see on average 5000 ads per day.

I reckon in the FIFA World Cup, it's like 5000 per minute. Just all of these ads, which are trying to trigger desire to get you to want things. It's sort of the human condition.

So coming off on that, what you talked about in the sermon was, one of the points you talked about is that you can't just not want the other things, right?

You got to cultivate a desire of Christ and focusing on Him.

And you quoted the verse about Jesus saying, cut off your right hand that causes you to sin, and you say, well, if we did all that, we'd enter heaven, a mutilated corpse or something, from the Dallas Willard quote.

So I just want to kind of push you a little bit on that. Is there not a case to be made for quashing evil desires by starving them, as it were?

That if we can cut off our exposure to a certain sinful content or content that causes us to die or something, that that can help the desire to die down? What do you think?

Yeah, there's wisdom in that for sure. Going back to the Matthew 5 thing about cut off your hand, gouge out your eye, it's Willard who makes the point that Jesus is doing what's called a *reductio ad absurdum*, which means reduction to the absurd.

Because he says in Matthew 5, 27, he says, you've heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery, but I tell you, if your eye causes you to sin, cut it off.

And so the logic goes, okay, so I should take extreme measures to physically stop myself from being able to sin. But then you kind of dig deeper into the level of what Jesus is saying.

You could gouge out your eye and cut off your hand and still commit adultery in your heart. Because the whole point is that it's the heart that desires the wrong thing.

And so yes, there's wisdom in doing these practical stuff to stop us from having the ability to desire things. There's wisdom in that for sure.

But that's the will-art idea that we would roll into heaven a mutilated stump if we cut ourselves to pieces to try and stop ourselves from desiring. That's kind of when Jesus tells the parable of the treasure in the field.

He makes the point that we need to focus on the positive aspect of desire, not the negative. It's like if I say to you, don't picture a pink elephant. What are you picturing?

Pink elephant.

You can't help but picture a pink elephant.

And so, it's the Psalm 23 thing, I shall not want, I shall not want. The human heart doesn't work like that. I think the wisdom of Jesus is to positively desire Him and then trust that God will make the things of Earth grow strangely dim.

So, long way of saying, yes, there's practical stuff of cutting off access to these illicit desires or whatever is happening.

But the main thing is to get a vision of the surpassing worth of Christ and those negative desires will fall away on their own.

And I think what that looks like with the step before that is the acknowledgement part because if you think about it, we'll always have that desire to want something else.

That's the natural essence of what our heart is because we're naturally sinful. That's the way we are built.

And I think that's why with advertisements and all these different things, they trigger that motion of acknowledging that this is what I'm after, this is what I desire.

So I think it's very helpful to understand that we always have that desire to want the other thing, just naturally. And therefore, it's something that triggers it.

And then you can take the step of how do I starve it or how do I deal with it or surrender it. It's all those different things.

Desire is not a bad thing in itself. The problem is we desire the wrong things, all the right things in the wrong order. One of the things I was going to say, which I didn't get time in an already cramped message was St.

Augustine's idea of ordered loves or disordered loves. It's good to love footballs on the top of my mind because of the World Cup. And you see the passionate fans who are crying, the Argentinians are crying and the Spaniards are crying.

And it's a good thing to love football and your country and community and all these things. But when they are too high on the list of the loves, that becomes idolatry and it becomes a problem.

And so kind of this message is the idea of putting Christ at number one and letting everything else fall down into its proper place, the ordered loves, because desire is not the problem, it's disordered desire.

It's interesting, isn't it, that in many places, in Colossians in particular and Ephesians, it talks about take off the old. So it does seem like there's a focus on the unhelpful desires.

It's a complex mix, I reckon, of a revelation of the glory of God and the wonder of Jesus, the beauty of Jesus, I'm captivated by Jesus.

But the Bible is pretty clear, I reckon, you've got to put off the acts of the old nature and put on, clothe yourself with humility, kindness, love. So it's at the core of the struggle of Christianity, of discipleship, the reordering of our desires.

And from the New Testament, it seems like it's a challenge. And there's also the stuff we know about brain, plasticity, and even imaging of the brain, and what triggers desire.

And the classic one is a study, you can look up, that talked about healthy brains were firing with desire, with kale and vegetables, and no firing at all for pizza.

But the unhealthy body and brain that was trained to desire fatty foods, the literally the brain, the imaging was showing the desire firing, going nuts when the fatty food came out, which we could use as a metaphor for sin.

Yeah, I know some people have said that genuine Christ-likeness is to not even notice the sin. But how do you get to that? I feel like it's a complex thing.

There's a revelatory aspect, absolutely. That's Paul. He has the Road to Damascus revelation of Jesus.

And we all need that. But I feel like there is a really important part of learning to not go down unhelpful roads, to the point where it's like, oh, I didn't even notice it. That thing that causes others to stumble.

Focusing in, though, on the positive side of desire that you talked about, Ben.

And this idea that, as well as we've said, sort of putting off the evil desires that we should really focus in on desiring Jesus. I guess, how can we paint a picture of ourselves, of Jesus, in a way that makes us want to desire Him?

What are good ways for us to think about, you know, Jesus in a way that makes us want to sell everything we have to buy that field with the treasure in it?

Romans makes it pretty clear that it's the Gospel.

The first 11 chapters explain the wonder of the Gospel, and then Romans 12 has that great, Therefore, in view of all of that, offer your whole bodies as living sacrifices, but it really starts with the renewal of your mind, that it might be

Yeah, we're really inching into way form territory here.

Yeah, yeah.

Absolutely.

A verse which I've heard quoted from your sermons, Dad, 100,000 times in my years of living under your preaching is Romans 10 verse 17, that faith comes from hearing.

I think that's a crucial idea that the Word of the Kingdom, the Gospel of Jesus, comes to us from outside, from hearing the Word, both the Scripture and then the Word from our brother or sister.

And then God by His Spirit does a work of building faith as a result of hearing the message. And so you're asking, Jack, how do you get a vision of the surpassing worth of Jesus? You hear it.

You hear it preached. That's the, my main goal yesterday in Talking for Half an Hour was to like give that vision, even with my posture and my gestures and my tone of voice.

I'm trying to compel people to see the worth of Christ in order that things of earth would grow strangely dim and that we would desire Him more. And that's hearing, hearing the message of the Gospel, what He's done, who Jesus is.

It's kind of this faith comes from outside of us. It's inside of us, but it comes from hearing the Gospel outside of us.

Yeah, I couldn't agree more with what was said before. It's just, it's hard to give a step by step for something like that because there isn't a direct step by step. It's all a unique, personal, very personal experience that happens.

And I can't go far than the basic Sunday School answers about, yes, hear the Gospel and reach a Bible and all these things.

That's why we tell those to kids in Sunday School from a very early level, is because that's the foundation blocks that you take going into adult life. That's the next step that you take.

It's about, how can we, around discipline, read the Bible correctly and understand it? That's where I always go to when I hear a question like that.

It's also, I mean, I've made this point so many times in sermons.

It's the whole point of the Christ in Scripture project, that of course, Christ is so present in the Gospels and in the rest of the New Testament, but he's also present in the entire Old Testament.

And by studying Hosea and Leviticus and 1 Samuel, these books point us to the person of Jesus. Like an example is in the Genesis message a couple of months ago, the image of Abraham and Isaac, Abraham sacrificing Isaac.

And it says that Isaac carried the wood on his back up the mountain, which I had never made the connection before that. That's what Jesus did. He carried the cross on his back.

And so all of a sudden we're seeing Christ in Genesis, which gives us a vision of the fact that he would carry the instrument of his own execution for the great love that he had for us.

That's kind of, even in Genesis, seeing a vision of the worth of Christ, which is the whole point of this Christ in Scripture project.

There's a very significant connection between revelation and suffering, I think. So, when you say, how do you foster the desire to be just, I guess, fully enamored with Christ? All I want is Christ.

It's fascinating that when the classic revelation happens in Acts 9, isn't it? The road to Damascus. He sees the revelation of the risen Christ.

He says, wow! And then immediately, Jesus says, I need to show you how much you're going to suffer for my name.

And that passage we looked at yesterday, he says, I long to know you, the power of your resurrection, you know, because I saw you resurrected, and the fellowship of sharing in your sufferings.

I think if without suffering, I've always felt like Christianity is a fish that swims in the water of suffering. And without suffering, it's hard to have the revelation we're talking about. The two go hand in hand.

That's why we talk about the cruciform shaped life, the cross shaped life. It's as we embrace cross life, I've died, that Christ might live in me. What does that mean?

Sometimes it means suffering for His name, for His sake. Just suffering alone in the context of a broken world, health, relational carnage.

It's when we suffer because of the macro impact of sin that we're drawn to this revelation that we're talking about, isn't it? I think the two go hand in hand.

Genuinely, if you ask the prayer, if you ask, Lord, let me see you, you're probably asking for suffering.

I relate to that a lot, Jonah.

I feel like the times in my life where I've seen God, just from a personal experience, where I've seen Him and experienced Him at the richest point, at the points where the rest of my life things suck, and I feel like I'm suffering, like that

Because it makes sense.

All I want is you. It's much easier when it's all I have is you.

Yeah, 100 percent, 100 percent.

And that's the place that Paul's at, because he's in prison. Like he's got nothing at this point.

He's toward the end of his life, realizing that everything that he once thought was so great, now he's in prison and it means nothing, but he has Christ, so he has everything.

Now, moving on, thinking practically again, we actually had a question come in to the link that kind of dovetailed with a question that I had come up with independently. So, that's nice.

So, the question was, what are some specific practices for newer Christians to help them desire Christ more? And I had a similar question where I thought, what are the specific practices that help foster that desire?

But maybe looking at, especially for new Christians, what do you think?

There's a lot of answers. All of the spiritual disciplines will be helpful. The main one for a new Christian, I would suggest, is study.

If you don't have a background in the church, you're not super familiar with the Gospels or the story of the Bible.

There's a real need in those early days to immerse yourself in Scripture and the stories of the Gospels, to get to know who Jesus is and to know the stories, especially if you don't come from a church background. You need to know who this person is.

And as you do that, that's the faith comes from hearing thing that builds the desire for Christ. And there's a certain level of intensity required. I mean, how much water do you think a typical shower uses in liters?

How much water? Thirty liters. So what happens if you take a single drop every day for 30 years and uses the 30 liters?

Is that, does that ever equal a shower? The answer is no. Some things require intensity is the point.

You need 30 liters falling on you in five minutes to have a shower. In the same way, he makes the point that we need meditation, which is kind of focusing on one passage for a day.

But we also need study, which is reading big chunks of the gospel at once. We need both of these things. And especially if you're a new Christian, reading through the gospel of Mark, you could do it in a day.

You could do it over a couple of days. Is immersing yourself in the story of the gospel, giving yourself a vision of the greatness of Jesus.

And by God's grace, I trust and I believe that He will make you desire Christ more as a result of that effort.

That's good, I reckon. For new Christians, the three words starting with B is good to remember, believe, belong, become. That's a lot of what Christianity in community is all about.

So how do you foster belief? Exactly what Ben said, you need to study, you need to understand, what am I believing? Primarily about who is God, what's he like?

Because that's the most important thing. What am I believing? So I've got to study, I've got to learn.

I've got to spend time with him in prayer. And as Tristan often says, the belonging part is key. It's as I belong with others and I'm imitating, like we talked about last week, imitating those that have followed Jesus for longer.

I'm believing, I'm belonging, and I'm doing my best to copy and become, you know, become the type of person that acts differently. And that happens both through hard work, I think, and also through organic growth.

Yeah, I'm reminded of a devotional that I got when I just got saved by St. Clair Ferguson, where he speaks about spiritual disciplines on how you can delight in him.

And one of the main things that I took away under the umbrella of prioritizing connection with God through reading your Bible, through devotion, through community, one of the biggest things that I found the most helpful as soon as I got saved was

prioritizing breath prayers. And what that looks like is not sitting down and having a full on prayer. Yes, that's amazing. But it's about breath prayers, which I still do today.

It's like, if you're on the train and it's, you see something that's delightful, you say, thank you God for this. Or if you, before you go into a big meeting at work, Lord, please put my heart at ease.

So prioritizing those breath prayers was very helpful for my faith just going forward. Yeah.

The practicality of faith living in a body is just huge. So anything you can do with your body is helpful. For fostering to light in God.

It might be serving, and you see the Spirit at work in this opportunity to get a bit messy with people. The inconvenience of responding to a person in need. Praying on your knees, like what you're saying, Tristan.

Anything you can do, like raise your hands. People don't raise their hands in worship, but if you do, it's incredible how engaging that is for your soul, your whole being.

And the more that you contain your faith to silence and internal expression, the less it has the chance to impact your tabernacle, this thing you live your faith out in. It's your body.

And again, comes back to the passage we looked at in Galatians a few weeks ago. The life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me. This life, it's every day.

How am I going to live it in this body? And the only other thing I think of is, we've talked about Jerry Bridges sometimes, the joy of fearing God. So fearing God and finding joy in that is helpful.

It's so cool, the imagery, man.

Because you have, how do you commit yourself? You go by full immersion in two senses. So you get baptized and either full immersion, give your whole body to your church or to your community.

It's just awesome to see the repeated imagery throughout the series about Christ in Scripture, which is encouraging.

Yeah, it's such a good point. Like the baptism encapsulates what you're saying. You've got to be, Ben, you're talking about being committed, being immersed.

Yeah, Christianity, let's just say it, it doesn't work as an add-on. It doesn't make any sense as an add-on. Like the, it's full on language.

It's death and resurrection, not betterment of your life. Just sort of tweaking a few things. It's like, what are you asking?

Are you asking for everything, Lord? Yeah, yeah. Lest a man or woman come and die, you can't follow me.

Yeah, the old phrase, saving of souls.

But we talk about so often in this church is that the soul is your whole self. It's not just your inner part, it's your body, it's your mind, it's everything. It's when we say, we're saving your soul, we're saving all of you.

Yeah. I wanna turn now to something you discussed at the end of the sermon, Ben. When you got up on your little soapbox and told us never to use AI.

No, obviously you were more measured than that.

No, I don't know. That's the truth. Yeah.

No, no, it's slightly more nuanced, yeah.

But you talked about how one of the problems with AI is it can quash curiosity and therefore quash our desire to learn and grow deeper into God.

And while I take your point, simultaneous to that, obviously, people do have questions that they struggle with.

And I guess what is the difference between a healthy curiosity and desire for God, and the sort of unstable doubts that James describes in 1 verse 6, where you're constantly being tossed and turned by your questions, and they become a source of

Yeah.

So I have two immediate thoughts. The first one is don't ever internalize that question. So don't ever not vocalize your question if you are in need of an answer.

Would that be to God or to a fellow believer? Never try to diminish that curiosity or that question. And two, building from that is, when you ask a question, it's always helpful to have the attitude of expecting an answer back.

Because I feel like sometimes we can ask a question just for the sake of being confrontational or being in opposition to what I'm hearing. Try and take on board an answer just as they are taking on your question.

So it's about listening and accepting first in order to have a conversation instead of just firing our questions without expecting an answer. That's what I get.

I feel that the questions we ask are very important. And it's helpful to tap into the wisdom of the church. If you can find wisdom from the Bible and from the Holy Spirit, go for it.

But I think it's a very important part of Christianity to ask people you trust, is this question okay? Not every question is good. And that goes back to the very beginning of the fall.

Everyone has to remember, curiosity is not just an amoral thing. When the devil said, did God really say? That's the beginning of everything.

That's evil catastrophe, ruin of the earth and humanity, the universe, the cosmos. It all started with a curious question. Did God really say?

And you can ask any question, but you need wisdom from people to help you know when to drop a question. Because there are questions that will lead you down ruinous paths, and they need to be dropped.

And mainly, it's a question that will lead you to unbelief. So if I'm trying to be a wise mentor, I would say, can you see unbelief down that road? Be careful on that road, because unbelief will shipwreck you.

And people do get shipwrecked. People lose heart, and you tend to lose heart through unbelief, I think. You lose hope in the one who could help, because I don't believe anymore that he could help.

So, yeah, we need people to help us. It's nuanced. You need wisdom.

Wisdom comes from questions and from counsel.

That's good. That's a very hard question, actually. I remember at college when I was studying theology, one of the things that the lecturers would say is that theology done Christianly is faith-seeking understanding.

And I suppose when we're asking questions, we're asking from the perspective of faith, seeking understanding. That God, I sincerely love you and I desire to know you more, but I'm struggling with this thing and I want to understand.

The alternative to that is kind of what we're saying. It might be called doubt-seeking deconstruction. That you're asking a question in doubt because you are seeking to deconstruct and to move away from God.

And so maybe that's a helpful kind of line. Is your question coming from faith that is seeking understanding or doubt that is seeking deconstruction? Because one of those will move you closer to God and one of them will move you further away.

Yes, and I think to nuance that slightly, first of all, it's worth stating that our faith can handle questions.

This is not, Christianity is not fragile, that it will fall apart if you ask certain questions.

But also certain questions are not neutral truth seeking, certain questions in the way they frame things are clearly, as you say, oriented towards pushing you down a certain direction.

But also you use the word deconstruction, that's a sort of a hot button word in Christianity at the moment. We should acknowledge that there are some aspects of our understanding that need to be deconstructed.

When we have false images of faith or false understandings of faith, sometimes questions help us to deconstruct them in order then to build up a newer, more truer understanding.

I just offer those points as nuance to what you've both said, which is very good.

But that's what faith seeking understanding means.

Yes.

That I'm asking these questions, because I'm seeking to build faith and to trust God more. But if I'm trying to dismantle and trying to get away with things, then it's doubt seeking deconstruction, not seeking understanding.

And to get back on my AI soapbox for a moment, because we haven't really actually spoken about it. AI is not neutral either. It's shaped by the companies that build them.

I remember I was using one particular AI, and then I got convicted that I don't like what that company is doing. So I moved to another one. And the first question I asked this AI was, is God real?

Is Christianity true? And it said, no. I was like, oh, wow, okay.

Because the other AI that I had been using was telling me that God is real because it had learned what I think and was building its algorithm around my preferences.

It's like, well, this is kind of an interesting moment that these AI platforms are not morally neutral, kind of truth seeking. They are shaped by the companies that build them.

And so when it comes to the questions we have about faith, you got to be wary of that. Because the answers to those questions can squash desire for God.

And also, taking to your point about the previous AI that you had used, even if they say something you like, they're kind of designed to do that. They're kind of designed to give you the answer that you want as well.

So if you're genuinely seeking truth, they may not challenge you.

The crux of it is that I was a youth pastor for many years now. I'm a young adults pastor. I've had dozens and dozens and dozens of teenagers ask me questions about the Bible.

And in all of those situations, as a trained pastor, I would never give them the perfect answer and walk away and end the conversation. What I'm trying to do in that moment is to tap into their curiosity and ask why they're asking that question.

Because I'm trying to help them grow their faith. Whereas AI is, by design, trained to perfectly answer the question, and then that's the end of the conversation, which no human being would or should do. We're fostering faith.

And so that's really kind of the heart of my caution around using AI for spirituality. It can quash desire for God, which is something that should be fanned into flame instead. And that's the end of my soapbox rant.

Very good.

Very good. The interesting thing, because I'm not as anti-AI, is I've found that if you want it to respond, like you just said, you just ask it to. You just say, I don't want you to give me a packaged answer.

I want you to give me questions to foster this. And it's so smart that it tends to follow that. I hear what you're saying.

For sure, we don't just get the clean answers. The squash curiosity.

Well, to my chagrin, last episode, we had to cut the palate cleanser question. And this has been a bit of a longer episode as well, but hopefully you won't mind listening, or you can just leave the episode now if you want.

But our palate cleanser question this week. I was thinking about Philippians, and Ben, you said the occasion for Philippians was Paul received a gift from the church, and that caused him to rejoice and send this amazing letter. And what a gift.

I guess that church in Philippi gave us a gift by giving Paul a gift, prompting him to write Philippians. But my thought is, what is a particularly memorable or meaningful gift that you have received, that sticks in your memory?

You're all very quiet, so I'll go first.

I remember a few years ago, I had just finished my honors thesis at college, and Ben here very thoughtfully got his hands on it, printed it off into little books with really cool artwork and a title, and gave that to me as a birthday gift.

And that was one of the most creative and thoughtful gifts I've ever received.

Nice. We went on long service leave at a previous church, and some young adults just off their own bat got a bit of a fundraiser, put together a stack of money and gave it to us with our four kids.

Our six of us went on a holiday to New Zealand as part of long service leave, and it was very special to have a bunch of money, like over \$1,000, and they were just like, come on, do something really special.

So we went for a helicopter ride over, what was it? Friends Joseph Glacier. Friends Joseph Glacier, yeah.

Wow.

That was cool.

That's really touching.

Mine isn't a gift, but it's more like a moment that was gifted to me.

I just turned 18, and that morning, we were meant to all leave and go to our church camp at the time, and I remember we all had to, the check-in time was like two o'clock.

It took two hours to get there, so we had time in the morning, and one of my friends were like, let's just meet for coffee before we all drive together in this carpool.

And obviously, I got there, they know it's my birthday, and then all my friends were there as like a surprise birthday thing. That was like the first surprise party that I ever had, and that was pretty cool.

I cannot think of a single gift I've ever received.

Ben's never received a gift in his life.

No, I haven't, I just...

It was your birthday last week, wasn't it?

This sweater's pretty good. When I was 16, mom and dad helped me buy a guitar, and it was mostly a gift from them that I had put a little bit of money towards.

And it was a really significant moment for me because I was pivoting from electric guitar to acoustic guitar. And that was just over 10 years ago now. And now guitar is such a massive thing for my life and even my work.

So that was a significant gift.

You used to play the electric guitar.

I did, yeah. I was a little punk rocker. With long hair.

That makes sense with your hair, yeah.

All right. Well, that will do us for today. Thank you all for listening.

Thank you guys for coming on the pod today. And I hope you all have a really blessed week and that the Lord is with you. God bless.