

The Kingdom Turn Part 3

KINGDOM PASSION



A ReVision Resource

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

Kingdom Passion
The Kingdom Turn Part 3
A *ReVision* Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe
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Welcome to *ViewPoint*

Welcome to *Kingdom Passion*, the third study in our 8-studies series on *The Kingdom Turn*. In this part of our series we'll be considering what it means to know Jesus Christ, and why knowing Him must be the consuming passion of our Kingdom calling. *Kingdom Passion* is a *ReVision* Resource of The Fellowship of Ailbe.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on and discuss the questions provided. Don't be in a hurry. Be willing to take more than one session on a lesson if it will allow you to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We are happy to receive your suggestions for future topics and studies. Contact us at our webpage. And if you're not receiving *ViewPoint* first thing every day, then be sure to register on the website, www.ailbe.org.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Which One Thing?

¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3.13, 14

Make it simple, please!

I do not enjoy assembling things.

Opening a folder of instructions makes me sweat. While you might think that simple step-by-step directions would be easy enough to follow, they almost invariably throw me into confusion. Why can't things come ready-to-use? Or, at least, with just one simple thing required of me?

If I'm not mistaken, many of you are like this as well. "Keep it simple, stupid" is our mantra in life. Life is complicated enough as it is; the more we can simplify and cut to the chase, the easier and more agreeable any task will be.

Give me just one thing to do, and tie everything else into it, and I'll be fine.

A focus for our passion

This is what Paul is doing in our text. He was trying to simplify the Christian life for his readers, so that they could follow his own example and know more of the joy, peace, and power which are the rightful possession of all who believe in Jesus Christ. He wanted to give us one thing to concentrate on, to devote our passion to with all our heart.

When Paul says, "But one thing I do," believe me, I'm listening!

But hold on a minute. Even as I'm ready to jump in on Paul's "this one thing," I start hearing the echoes of other "one things" from elsewhere in Scripture.

In Psalm 27.4, for example, David prayed, "One *thing* I have desired of the LORD..." Surely that "one thing" is at least as important as what Paul commends?

Again, I hear the words of Jesus, "But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness..." (Matt. 6.33). According to Jesus, nothing is more important than that we passionately desire the Kingdom and righteousness of God. Does that put him in conflict with David and Paul? Should we take Jesus' instruction as the key to pure and undefiled religion, and set David and Paul aside?

But then along comes James, Jesus' half-brother – who therefore ought to know about such matters – and says, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this..." (Jms. 1.27). Uh oh, are we about to get yet another "this one thing" to add to the "one things" we've already considered? Are unbelievers right when they insist that Christianity is so full of contradictions that no one can really know what it means?

Then, as if to make matters even more complicated, I recall Jesus' words to Martha in Luke 10.42: "But one thing is needed..." And what He recommends here isn't the same as what He commands in Matthew 6:33!

And, still later in His ministry, when Jesus explains that all the Bible boils down to loving God and loving our neighbors, has He come up with yet another "this one thing" for us to pursue (Matt. 22.34-40)? Can't even Jesus get it straight about the "one thing" we most need to concentrate on as His followers and disciples?

One thing? Really?

This is going to take a while. All these competing instructions, these various “one things”, are starting to make my head spin. Is it really possible to reduce the Christian faith to “one thing” as the most important among the many “other things” that go with believing in Jesus? One thing to devote ourselves to above all else in this life?

Can we assemble the life of faith in one step?

And if so, then how shall we do it? And how shall we overcome the appearance – if that’s what it is – of contradiction and inconsistency in what it means to follow Jesus Christ?

That’s what we’re going to try to sort out in this series. Christianity is not a complicated religion. It doesn’t divide our affections between competing interests. One overarching passion must guide all those who have made the Kingdom turn. Following Jesus boils down to one thing, around which all other things in the life of faith orbit, from which they all derive their significance, and of which they all partake.

For reflection or discussion

1. Is Christianity full of contradictions? Why do people say this? How should we respond?
2. What would you say is the “one thing” that must be most important in our lives? Why?
3. What is necessary for you to know that “one thing” increasingly?
4. What do you hope to gain from these studies? How do you hope your life will change?
5. What obstacles are presently keeping you from achieving the “one thing” that matters most in life?

Next steps: Suppose someone asked you to summarize the Christian faith in a single sentence. What would you say? Ask a few of your Christian friends about this.

Prayer:

2 What God Requires

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you...?” Deuteronomy 10.12

Begin here

In order to discover what is most important in being a follower of Jesus Christ, we should go back as far as we can – turn to the beginning of the manual, so to speak.

The book of Deuteronomy is a good place start, for it was written shortly after the Lord redeemed His people from Egypt and before they began the work of laying hold on His precious and very great promises in the land of Canaan.

And here, sure enough, early in the book of Deuteronomy, we find the Lord Himself, through the mouth of Moses, putting before Israel what sounds very much like the one thing He expects of them as His people.

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you...?” That’s what we want to know. What is that “one thing” that will define Israel as the people of God, that “one thing” that should command all their passion and devotion? For surely in this one thing we should hope to find some clue as to what the Lord requires of us.

God answers His own question: “...what does the LORD require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD...?”

Oh. Is that all?

One thing, or many?

At first it might appear that Yahweh’s “one thing” is actually a variety of different things – fear, walk, love, serve, keep. That sounds like a lot to figure out, keep straight, and actually do.

But *why* should we fear the Lord, unless we know something about Him that might incline us to such a response? And how can we *walk* in His ways or *serve* Him if we don’t know where He walks or what will please Him? And can we *love* the Lord unless we know Him to be worthy of loving? Or *keep* His commandments, unless we would do so from the very depths of our being, knowing Him Who gave them?

All these affections and instructions assume a prior state – the state of *knowing* the Lord.

As Israel came to *know* the Lord they discovered that He was certainly a God to be feared. They saw what He did to Pharaoh and Egypt, as well as to all the kings and nations who tried to oppose Him. He is a God of great power, holy in all His being and ways, and not one to suffer fools and sinners indefinitely.

At the same time, this holy, awesome, and fearsome God had extended His saving mercy to them, an unworthy people, really, a people of no account at all. He simply loved them, and, once they understood that, it made it possible for them, *knowing* Him, to love Him in return. Knowing and loving Him, they would want to be with Him, and thus to walk in His ways, and it would be their heart’s desire to please Him because of His mercy and grace toward them.

Knowing God

So all the things that God “requires” of His people seem to flow logically out of their *knowing* Him. Indeed,

the very first of God's commandments begins with His declaration to them of Who He is – their Redeemer and Lord. To know God is to *fear* and *love* Him, and to *follow*, *serve*, and *obey* Him. God could not require such things of us if He did not first make Himself known to us. But once we begin to *know* the Lord, then all these requirements make perfect sense, and follow like night after day.

To *know* God is both to fear and love Him; it is to walk the path He walks, to look for ways of pleasing Him, to enjoy His favor and delight in His pleasure, and to obey the wisdom and promise of His revealed statutes and commands.

The one thing necessary for us to fulfill all that God requires is that we should *know* Him. And this involves receiving what He is pleased to reveal about Himself, as much as we can, from the words He speaks and the works He does.

God is to be known in His works and His words, and, since we will neither fear nor love Him, serve nor obey Him, enjoy nor delight in Him, apart from knowing Him, it appears that what lies back of what God requires of us is that we *know Him*, know Him personally and intimately, and relate to Him as His children, people, and friends.

One thing, therefore, is necessary, and one passion should consume us, if we would do what God requires and enjoy the blessings of our Kingdom citizenship, and that is that we should know Him.

For reflection or discussion

1. Should Christians really fear God? Why or why not? What does it mean to fear God?
2. How is fearing God related to loving Him?
3. How do the fear of God and love for Him affect the way we live?
4. Can we fear God and love Him if we don't know Him? Explain:
5. What does it mean to "know" God? How would you work that idea into a presentation of the Gospel?

Next steps: How did you come to know the Lord? Sort out your thoughts about this, then share them with an unbelieving friend.

Prayer:

3 To Gaze upon His Beauty

*One thing I have desired of the LORD,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple. Psalm 27.4*

A man after God's heart

David enjoyed a special relationship with God. He was not a perfect man, by any means, but few before or after him ever sought the Lord with such diligence and consistency.

Indeed, God Himself described David as a man after God's own heart, just the kind of man in whose company the Lord was sure to take delight (1 Sam. 13.14; Acts 13.22). Just the kind of man, too, from whom we might expect to learn something about what matters most in being a follower of God.

In our text we find David exclaiming about "one thing" which he would ask of the Lord, one thing that, above all other things, was of most importance to him. Perhaps in David's request we might gain more insight into the true nature of pure and undefiled religion?

To linger with the Lord

Notice the "one thing" David desired: He wanted to linger in the presence of the Lord, in His very house, to be there continually, so that he might gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and reflect on the experience of thus knowing the Lord so intimately, profoundly, and personally.

Now David was a busy man, with many responsibilities. He had many enemies as well. We might suppose that the "one thing" David would have sought from the Lord would relate to his ability to keep his affairs in order and secure, or to govern wisely and without fear of enemies.

Undoubtedly all these things pressed on David continually, day after day. Moreover, David had children to raise, armies to feed, and disputes to settle among His people. He would have needed much in the way of wisdom and wealth in order to fulfill all these pressing duties.

Yet above any and all of these things David sought "one thing" from the Lord: To be in His presence. To see, with the eye of the heart, the spiritual and moral beauty of the Lord, to contemplate long and deeply the glory of God, and to experience the secure and transforming presence of the Lord without interruption.

Knowing the Lord

Is David simply giving us another perspective on what God through Moses had commanded His people on the plains of Moab? Is David also insisting that the "one thing" that matters, above all other things in life, the one thing about which to be most passionate, is to know the Lord, to be intimate with Him, to see and participate in Him, to fill one's mind and heart with the presence and pleasure of the Lord, and to carry that presence, that relationship into every other detail and duty of one's life?

This is indeed what David intends.

Such dwelling with, gazing upon, and meditating on the beauty of the Lord also involves two other verbs, as David notes – "seeking" the face of the Lord, and "waiting" on the goodness of the Lord (Ps. 27.8, 13, 14). If

we would “see” the Lord in all his beauty, and enjoy the pleasure that comes in His presence, we must devote ourselves to seeking His face and waiting on Him. This means turning to prayer, searching the Word of God, and communing with Him as He makes Himself known through His many works (Ps. 19).

David’s “one thing” is exactly in line with what God requires of all His people; His way of attaining to that one thing is not an alternative to fearing, loving, and obeying God, but simply one more avenue – seeking, learning, meditating, and waiting – by which they who *know* the Lord may enter more deeply and more continuously into the knowledge of God, into the very real and palpable, passionate experience of God and His glory.

For reflection or discussion

1. What is the “beauty” of the Lord? How does one “gaze” upon that beauty?
2. Should gazing on the beauty of the Lord be something we do more of in our lives? Do the Christians you know spend much time gazing on the beauty of the Lord?
3. What does it mean to “seek” the Lord’s face? Where would you look?
4. How does one “wait” on the Lord? What is the “goodness” of the Lord? Do you expect to see His goodness in the land of the living? Explain:
5. Meditate on Revelation 1. What do you learn here about the face of Jesus Christ?

Next steps: What does it mean to “seek” the Lord? Or to “wait” on Him? Ask a pastor or church leader to help you understand these questions.

Prayer:

4 “Hear Him!”

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!” Matthew 17.5

A glory-filled moment

Was there ever a more glory-filled moment than what Peter, James, and John experienced on the mount of transfiguration?

Think of the wonder, excitement, fear, and joy they must have felt! Suddenly, before their very eyes, Jesus began to be transformed. His garments and visage turned the most brilliant white. Light radiated from every aspect of His being. Then Elijah and Moses showed up, discussing Jesus’ pending death and resurrection.

Certainly Peter had never seen anything like this. This must be what Jesus had called them to know! This must be the fulfillment of their discipleship! Obviously believing as much, Peter concluded that it was good for them all to be there – too bad about the other guys, I suppose – and why didn’t he just build a few tents for them to, you know, camp out together in perpetuity?

Peter was passionate to linger in the presence of Christ’s transformed glory. Surely this one thing is why Jesus had called him. It would take a spoken word from God to redirect Peter’s passion to where it ought to be.

One more thing

Seeing this glorious sight was not as important as one more thing, which God Himself declared when He commanded the terrified disciples to listen to the words of His Son, Jesus Christ. For a few moments of glory on a mountain are fleeting, and not the kind of experience all the followers of God should expect to know. If we exhaust our passion in pursuit of such “peak experiences,” we’re likely to be disappointed. The Christian life does not consist in knowing happy times, exciting times, fun times, or any kind of mountain-top experiences.

The Christian life consists in knowing the Lord, and for this to happen, we must be passionate about hearing Him.

Peter himself would later observe that there was one thing “more sure” than even such an experience as this, and that one thing was the Word of the God, the very Word of Jesus Christ Himself (cf. 2 Pet. 1.16-21). The Word of God in Scripture is where we may expect to encounter the living Christ with greater presence, power, and transforming effect than if we had such mountain-top experiences of His glory every day (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

For in the Word of the Lord, the Word of God concerning His Son, Jesus Christ, we discover the face of God Himself, and we learn about His greatness, holiness, and power. There we meet the Lord in His glory, as the Spirit parts the veil that separates time from eternity, and ushers us into the divine presence. We tremble before His immensity and might, and we are humbled with gratitude to know that this glorious and awesome God has set His love on us. We see Him in His glory, as the Spirit takes the revelation of Christ and works within and upon us to transform us into that same image.

Filled with fear and joy and love at the beauty we have beheld, we go forth with glad hearts to wait on the goodness of the Lord in obedience to His every Word. No wonder Jesus explained to Martha that listening to Him, abiding in His Word, was more important than all the frenzied works we might do in order to please others and meet their needs. These matter, to be sure; but they are not as important as the one thing God commanded those glory-struck disciples.

This way to knowing the Lord

In the Lord's command to Peter, James, and John we find nothing other than a clarifying of what He spoke to Israel through Moses, and what David was seeking in the presence of the Lord. God the Father calls us to listen to Jesus Christ, to seek His presence in all of Scripture (Jn. 5.39), to discover in Him the realization of all God's promises (2 Cor. 1.20), the embodiment of all God's wisdom (Col. 2.1, 2), and the very radiance of the divine Being Himself (Heb. 1.3).

By hearing Jesus in the Scriptures we come to know God, for whoever has known Jesus has known the Father, as Jesus Himself explained (Jn. 14.9).

We can only know God through Jesus Christ, and we can only know Jesus Christ as God is pleased to reveal Him to us through His Word and His works. Listen to Him! Listen *for* Him, in every section of Scripture, in all the works and wonders of creation, in the 10,000 places where, as Gerard Manley Hopkins explained, Christ "plays" every day before us.

The one thing any of us can do that will endure forever is to sit like Mary in the presence of Jesus Christ, as often as we may, and listen to Him as He speaks to us, and shows us in His glory-filled face (2 Cor. 4.6) the Father of all glory Himself.

One thing is needed: Jesus is speaking in His Word, leading us into the knowledge of God. Let us hear Him.

For reflection or discussion

1. Why is listening to Jesus "more sure" than seeing Him in His glory?
2. How would you explain to a new believer what it means to "listen" to Jesus and why he should?
3. How do you "listen" to Jesus in your own walk with Him? Are you hearing Him as clearly and as often as you should? How do you know?
4. If you could improve your ability to hear Jesus speaking in His Word, what would that require?
5. Suggest some ways that believers can help one another to be more consistent in listening to Jesus and hearing Him:

Next steps: Do you find reading, studying, and meditating in Scripture to be a "mountain-top" experience? Why or why not? What are some things that can keep us from being passionate about know Christ in His Word? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.

Prayer:

5 Seek This First

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Matthew 6.33

This one thing?

So far it seems that the “one thing” that really matters in life is knowing God through Jesus Christ. As we know God – really engage Him personally, intimately, and from the depths of our being – we learn to fear and love Him at the same time, and we desire to please, serve, obey, and continue with Him at all times, in all we do.

We find that gazing on His moral and spiritual beauty is well worth the seeking and waiting we have to do in order to know Him as He intends. And especially as we focus on discovering the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking to us through all the revelation of God, do we find a Friend we can trust and who can lead us ever more deeply into the knowledge of the living God.

Knowing God is the consuming passion of all those God has called into His Kingdom and glory, all who have made the Kingdom turn.

More “one things”

Jesus, as we listen to Him, confronts us with His own set of “one things” that He would have us embrace.

All the Word of God, which speaks of Jesus, can be summed up in the commands to love God and our neighbor (Matt. 22.34-40). If we meet God in His Word, we will love Him, and, loving Him, we will walk in His way, know His goodness, and show His love to our neighbor. We cannot love our neighbor if we do not love God; and we cannot love God if we do not seek Him through Jesus Christ in His Word.

Jesus also calls us to seek the Kingdom of God, that realm of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit by means of which Jesus is advancing His eternal purposes on earth as they exist in heaven (Rom. 14.17-19). We’ll have more to say about this pursuit in a later installment in this series.

We may know the Lord Jesus, and through Him, our heavenly Father, through the works He is doing. Chief among these is the work of extending righteousness, peace, and joy *in the Holy Spirit* to men and nations everywhere. This comes through the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom, in which we call people to repent and believe the Good News that in Jesus Christ God has made a way for us to escape our slavery to sin and be liberated into a life-changing relationship with the living God.

From there we seek the Kingdom increasingly in our own lives and spheres of experience. We strive violently, as it were (Matt. 11.12; Lk. 16.16), to lay aside our sinful ways and be clothed on with our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 4.17-24). The Kingdom of God is real power, spiritual power, to make all things new in our lives (1 Cor. 4.20; 2 Cor. 5.17-21). As we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 3.18) and join Him in seeking the progress of this heavenly realm, we walk with Him according to His agenda, join hands with Him in His work, and thus deepen that relationship of love with Him that daily spurs us on to faithfulness and obedience.

“One thing” like all the others

Jesus commands us to make seeking the Kingdom of God our highest priority in every area of life. But this “one thing,” like the others we have seen thus far, turns out to be yet another conduit, another avenue, along which we make progress in the knowledge of God and in making Him known to others.

Through seeking the Kingdom we bring the reality of the risen Christ, and the power of His eternal reign,

into the everyday details and situations of our lives, so that, like Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, the glory of the eternal God, Whom we know, fear, love, and serve, begins to be manifested through all our words and works (1 Cor. 10.31).

Through our relationship with Jesus Christ we stand in the hope of glory (Rom. 5.1, 2). By seeking His face on His eternal throne and through His infallible Word, we engage Him in His glory, and are transformed by His Spirit to reflect His very image and that of His eternal realm.

From there we go forth each day, citizens in the Kingdom of God's dear Son, having listened to Him as He shows us the Father, to show that we know Whom we have believed by bringing His glory to bear and His Kingdom to light in every area of our lives.

This "one thing" too is but one more privileged and passionate means by which we may know God and make Him known.

For reflection or discussion

1. Meditate on Romans 14.17-19. What is the Kingdom of God? Why does it matter?
2. What does it mean to "seek" the Kingdom of God? How can seeking the Kingdom serve as a priority for every aspect of your life?
3. What kinds of things get in the way of our seeking the Kingdom of God?
4. How can we tell when we're making progress in seeking the Kingdom of God?
5. How does seeking the Kingdom of God relate to our calling to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom?

Next steps: Use the following words to write a single sentence describing your relationship with Jesus Christ: fear, love, seek, contemplate, obey, hear. Share that sentence with a Christian friend and ask your friend to respond.

Prayer:

6 Eternal Life

¹² *What shall I render to the Lord*

For all His benefits toward me?

¹³ *I will take up the cup of salvation,*

And call upon the name of the Lord.

¹⁴ *I will pay my vows to the Lord*

Now in the presence of all His people. Psalm 116.12-14

Knowing Christ

It's looking more and more like the "one thing" that matters most of all in the Christian life is knowing Jesus Christ and, through Him, God the Father. The more we can focus all the affections of our heart on this, the greater will be our realization of the full and abundant life Jesus came to give us.

We know Christ by the Spirit of God, Who comes with the proclamation of the Kingdom of God to dwell within us, making us new creatures in Jesus Christ (Jn. 6.63; Gal. 4.6). That same Spirit teaches us the things of God by comparing the words of Scripture with one another until an ever-clearer picture of Jesus Christ and His will for our lives begins to emerge (1 Cor. 2.12, 13; Jn. 5.39).

We see the evidence of Jesus upholding the world and all things in it and advancing His Kingdom through the peoples and cultures of the world. Everywhere we look, the glory of God, radiating from the face of Jesus Christ, encounters, engages, and entralls us, so that, increasingly, we are being transformed into that same image (Ps. 19.1-4; 2 Cor. 4.6; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Eternal life

This is exactly what we might have suspected, for as Jesus Himself noted, eternal life, life imperishable, incorruptible, full of glory, joy, and love, consists in nothing other than knowing God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent (Jn. 17.3). When we know Jesus truly, personally, and with increasing intimacy, we are experiencing the life for which we were created. For Jesus bestows on us all the benefits of the Lord, all the blessings of forgiveness, peace, joy, hope, and power for living a completely new and different way of life, all the precious and very great promises by which we become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1.4).

Knowing Jesus Christ is the "one thing" that matters most in life. If we know Him, He is all that matters; if we do not, then we'll always be looking for something to make our lives make sense and seem to be worthwhile.

Drink it down!

The writer of Psalm 116 was filled with the sense of God's many benefits. He declared His love for the Lord, Who had mercy on him, listened to his prayers, and rescued him from distress and anguish (vv. 1-3). He knew the Lord to be gracious and righteous, full of mercy and compassion, able to save and keep those on whom He sets His love (vv. 5-7). He had come to know the joy of God's deliverance, the bounty of His blessings, and the strength to live as God commanded (vv. 7-9). Knowing God in this intimate, personal way, the psalmist resolved to turn away from the lies, half-truths, and deceitful schemes of the unbelieving world (vv. 10, 11). He intended one thing and one thing only in response to the love God had shown him.

He would lift up the cup of salvation as an expression of his joy and gratitude at knowing God in this way.

What does that mean?

It means he intended to become drunk with the saving and renewing grace of the Lord, to be filled, not with the fruit of the vine, but with the Spirit of the indwelling God (cf. Eph. 5.18-21).

It meant he intended, by hoisting his glass of salvation, to salute and honor the One Who made such a life of freedom, joy, and power known to him.

It meant that he was inviting all others who share in this cup of salvation to join with him in toasting their glorious Savior and Lord and becoming filled with more of His saving presence and glory.

Once you come to know the Lord, really to experience Him and the benefits He brings, you'll want to do the same. You'll be truly passionate about the Lord, and you'll want more of this one thing that matters so much, knowing God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent.

Nothing in this life, nothing in the world, will hold any thrall for the person who has come to know Jesus and who is growing day by day in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Ps. 16; 2 Pet. 3.18).

Does this describe you? Have you discovered the one thing that matters most in life? If so, friends, then lift your glass to the Lord.

For reflection or discussion

1. Imagine that you are trying to explain the salvation of the Lord to a lost friend. What would you say?
2. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? How can one know when he is filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5.18-21)?
3. Meditate on Galatians 5.22, 23. How is this related to the filling of the Holy Spirit?
4. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 12.7-11. How is this related to the filling of the Holy Spirit?
5. Meditate on Acts 1.8 and John 16.8-11. How are these related to the filling of the Holy Spirit?

Next steps: What does it mean for you to "lift the cup of salvation" to the Lord each day? How will you do that today?

Prayer:

7 Press On!

⁷ But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Philippians 3.7-11

Full circle

We return to the Apostle Paul and his “one thing”, where we began this series, in which we have discovered what is most important for us as followers of Jesus Christ. The passage above comes immediately prior to the passage with which we began this series, Philippians 3.14. Paul intends to know Christ; knowing Him is the “one thing” toward which he presses with all his passion and might.

What we’ve seen is that the various “one things” which Moses, David, and Jesus held out as most important are really facets of the same one thing – knowing God in a deeply personal, intimate, and transformational way by growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. When we know God, really know Him, when we sustain a daily relationship that draws us into His presence and glory, so that we actually participate in Him, then no one has to teach us to fear or love Him. We see His beauty, the moral and spiritual perfections of the Divine Essence, and we seek His face and wait on Him to reveal Himself more fully. To that end we listen to His Son, Jesus, as He speaks to us from the works and Word of God.

The one thing

The one thing that matters in the Christian life, therefore, is precisely this: To know God and Jesus Christ as the manifestation of the Father.

This is eternal life, as we have seen. This is what we have been created and redeemed to enjoy. And this is only available to us in Jesus Christ. Not *with* Jesus or even *from* Jesus. But Jesus, Jesus Himself.

In Jesus we discover the beauty, majesty, wisdom, goodness, mercy, kindness, awesomeness, and power of God Almighty. In His face we see the radiance of God’s glory. In His Spirit we are led into the secret recesses of divine truth and empowered to live increasingly into the very image of Jesus Himself. The upward calling that God has prepared for us is that we should know Jesus Christ, and through Him, to know, enjoy, and glorify God in every aspect of our lives.

But let’s listen carefully to Paul (v. 13): “But one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press...” At the end of Paul’s “one thing” is the upward prize of the calling of God in Christ Jesus: knowing Jesus Christ in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering.

But the “one thing” Paul *does* is to “press on.” Knowing Christ doesn’t just happen. We have to apply ourselves diligently to this one thing, or we will never know Him at all.

Notice the language Paul uses to describe this one thing. First, he refuses to be mired in or limited by his experience. He “forgets” what lies behind; whether what was in his past was sinful or glorious, Paul didn’t dwell on it. He would not allow either the burdens or the accolades of his past experience to keep him from pressing on to an even deeper and more intimate knowledge of Jesus Christ. Paul would not allow himself to

plateau, and would not wallow in the swamps and snares of his past failures or any of the treachery done to him by others. All that was behind him, and he determined to keep it there.

Instead, Paul described himself as “reaching forward to those things which are ahead.” Paul knew that the Christian life possesses infinite promise for increasing in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. He understood that God had assigned him a mission field, which he was determined to work and to enlarge. He had known the power of God’s Spirit working within him to make him willing and able to do the pleasure of God, and he was aware that that same Spirit was able to do exceeding abundantly more than he had ever dared to ask or think (Eph. 3.20). He remained passionate for more of the same.

It was that “exceeding abundantly” more of Jesus that Paul was passionate to know – the love of Christ, as he put it, which goes beyond knowledge (Eph. 3.19). So he strained forward – in prayer, in seeking the Lord in His Word, in evangelizing the lost, in repenting of sin, in growing into Christlikeness, in doing works of ministry, in making the most of every moment of every day of his life – so that he could know more of Jesus, experience more of His presence and power, and be more and more conformed to His image in glory.

This is the one thing that mattered to Paul. This is what he was passionate about as an ambassador of Jesus Christ. We must ask ourselves: Do we share this passion?

If you’ve made the Kingdom turn, you’ll know.

For reflection or discussion

1. What does “pressing on” mean in your life? How can others tell that you are “pressing on”?
2. In what ways can our past keep us from pressing on?
3. How would you explain to a new believer what he or she needs to do in order to strain forward for the upward prize of Jesus Christ?
4. What is the upward prize of Jesus Christ? Why is this the most important thing anyone can know?
5. What have you gained from these studies? How will your own walk with and work for the Lord change as a result?

Next steps: What’s involved in your daily “reaching forward to those things which are ahead”? How can you encourage a fellow believer to share with you in this Kingdom passion?

Prayer:

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Thank you.