

**AIM**

- To explain how we can know Christ

**EXPLORE**

- *What questions do you have over the Follow-Up from Session 5?*
- Read Philippians 3:1-4
  - *Why do the Philippians need a safeguard (vv. 1-2)?* They were in danger; Paul’s words were vital to keep them alert and watchful for the danger of false teaching.
  - *Some people were teaching that physical circumcision is necessary. Why does Paul say that Christians “are the circumcision” (cf. Romans 2:28-29)?* Last session, we saw that nothing we do makes us right with God. Romans 2 reminds us that it is our hearts that make us unacceptable to God—and only the Holy Spirit can change our hearts. This change is what Paul refers to as the true circumcision.
  - *What other marks of the true believer does Paul mention in verse 3?* Paul says that believers: “worship by the Spirit of God” (i.e., that the whole of their lives are directed by the Holy Spirit); “glory in Christ Jesus” (i.e., rejoice in Jesus and all that He has done for them); and “put no confidence in the flesh” (i.e., don’t depend on anything they have done to make them right with God).
  - *Paul wanted the Philippians to put their confidence in Jesus and in nothing else. Why are Christians sometimes tempted to put their confidence in additional things?* It is often hard to trust that we can be saved and live by grace alone. Sometimes it feels more comfortable to rely on our own actions as a measure of how right we are with God. It’s easier to live by sight than by faith.
  - *What things can we be tempted to rely on in addition to our confidence in Christ?* How often we read the Bible, how earnestly we pray, how many people we tell about Jesus, etc.
  - *What should we remember when we are tempted to place confidence in these additional things?* Philippians 3:9 gives us an answer.

**LISTEN (DVD)**

*“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection  
and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings” (Philippians 3:10).*

**Introduction**

It’s June 1944, and the American, British, Canadian and French allies have landed on the beaches of Normandy. In the east, Hitler’s armies are fighting a losing battle against the Russians, the Luftwaffe has been destroyed, the German army is crumbling. Everyone knows that the victory is won, and that it will not be long before the war is over. So do they sit around and do nothing? Not at all. There are still hard months of military campaigning to go.

Last week, we saw that Paul has no confidence in his own religious “goodness”. Instead, he wants “the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith” in Jesus Christ. That is the only way that any of us can be accepted by God: because of his goodness, not ours.

But once we’ve put our trust in Christ, is that it? Do we just sit back, secure in the knowledge that God accepts us?

Not according to Paul. His desire is “to know Christ” (v 10). The word “know” here doesn’t just mean “to be acquainted with”; it speaks of knowing better, more deeply, more intimately. Yes, it even means “to become like”. We can see that from the way Paul continues: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.” Paul wanted to strive forward, leaving the starting line, running the race, and attaining the prize.

So how can we “know Christ” in this way? Paul gives us four pointers.

### **1. To “know Christ” we must be suffering Christians (vv. 10-11).**

Paul wants to walk where Jesus walked, and that means following the path marked “suffering”—taking up our crosses, denying ourselves, and following Jesus. That doesn’t mean that we should seek suffering for the sake of suffering, but it does mean that we should expect suffering if we are being obedient to God.

**Application:** Many of us live entire lives that are calculated to avoid offending people. This is one way we attempt to avoid suffering. But, are you willing to suffer so that you know Christ better?

### **2. To “know Christ” we must be dissatisfied Christians (v. 12).**

Even Paul, arguably the greatest Christian who ever lived, never claims to be perfect or to “have arrived” (v 12-13: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect... I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it...”). Therefore, he “pressed on” (2x) “to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” The more Paul gets to know Christ, the hungrier he is to know Him more.

**Application:** Beware of any Christian – or any teaching – that says you can be a perfect Christian here and now. We should be satisfied with Christ, but dissatisfied with the imperfection of our Christian life. Paul’s dissatisfaction with his own Christian life drives him to know Christ better.

- *Add your own personal illustration here. Think of a time when God showed you that you still had a lot to learn.*

### **3. To “know Christ” we must be forgetful Christians (vv. 13-14).**

There is “one thing I do”, says Paul (v 13). He forgets “what is behind” and strains towards “what is ahead”. His point is to only look back if it helps you press forward.

**Application:** There are two dangers when we look back at our past. We can either become paralysed by regret because of past experiences; or we can become complacent or arrogant if we rest on past triumphs. But Paul refuses to allow his past to catch up with him like that. He stays focused on what Christ did in the past that frees him from his past guilt, and he stays focused on “what is ahead” in his pursuit of Christ. This was his single focus.

### **4. To “know Christ” we must be disciplined Christians (vv. 13-14).**

Paul speaks in very physical, strenuous language, as if he’s an athlete training for the Olympics (v 12-14: “I press on... straining towards what is ahead...I press on towards the goal...”).

There’s no concept of “let go and let God” with Paul; no “stop trying and start trusting” (though, of course, Paul knows it’s not all about our effort). He knows that if he wants to know Christ, if he wants to become like him, it will require continuous effort. Be an athlete; be disciplined. A big part of that is to discipline yourself to know the Bible.

**Application:** Have you found it difficult to set aside the time to do your daily Bible reading? Have other things got in the way of being at church or *Discipleship Explored*? We need to be convinced that knowing Christ is the most important thing, if we are to be strong enough to turn off the TV and open our Bibles.

## 5. To “know Christ” we must be heavenly-minded Christians (vv. 15ff).

Verses 18 and 19 describe those who live as “enemies of the cross of Christ”. “Their mind is on earthly things”; in other words, they can’t see beyond the here and now (i.e., “whose god is their belly”), and they only live for the present moment. But, says Paul, “our citizenship is in heaven” (v 20).

To know Christ, we must understand that heaven is our home. We are called “heavenwards” (v 14), we belong there (v 20), our Saviour will return from there (v 20), and he will transform “our lowly bodies” (v 21) into glorious bodies that will spend eternity there. Keeping that heavenly perspective, says Paul, is “how you should stand firm in the Lord” (Philippians 4:1).

- *You may want to use this illustration: Supposing we decide that our country is no longer worth living in, and we become convinced that Peru is the place to be. We receive our Peruvian citizenship, but must wait six months before we move there. What will we do in the meantime? We will not spend our time building up our attachment to our old country – extending our home, buying things that we will have to leave behind when we move, forming relationships that have no future. We will spend time getting ready to live in our new country – learning the language, the customs, the national anthem, the history. And we will think about and talk to each other about how marvellous it will be when we move there.*

## Conclusion

Knowing Christ should change the way we look at everything – our homes, our work, our relationships, what we spend our money on, what we give our time to. Knowing Christ is not just the aim of life; it is life.

## DISCUSS

- *Was there something in particular that stood out or struck you from the DVD?*
- *In your own words, what is the “one thing” Paul does (vv. 12-14) and why?*
- *From verses 12-16, what might hinder us from pressing on? What should encourage us to keep pressing on?*
- *In verse 16, Paul says, “Let us live up to what we have already attained.” The example of others can help us do this. Why is it important to choose the right role-models (vv. 17-19)?*
- *Look at the phrases in verse 19 that describe those who are “enemies of the cross of Christ.” How do people behave in these ways today?*
- *What are the sharp contrasts between the descriptions in verse 19 and those in verses 20-21?*
- *In the middle of daily life, what does it mean for you to know that your “citizenship is in heaven” and that Christ will return?*

## FOLLOW-UP

See the document entitled “Session 6 Follow-Up.” Please note that these follow-up questions differ from the ones in the *Discipleship Explored Handbook*.