

Making the Most of Wednesday, December 23

Merry Christmas!

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" — Phil. 3:14



BETWEEN 6:00 AM—9:00 AM: JOURNEY INTO THE VERTICAL

First, Merry Christmas, Valley Church Family! Second, congratulations to Emily Harrington. She made history last month in Yosemite by becoming the first woman to free climb a section of El Capitan in less than 24 hours. ("Free climbing" means that the athlete pulls herself up without the help of equipment. Her gear only keeps her from falling to the ground if she slips.) Emily started in the moonlight at 1:00 AM on Wed., Nov. 5, and 21 hours, 13 minutes and 51 seconds later, she reached both the summit and heroic status.

Emily was seized with an impulse to scale steep inclines when she was a kid growing up in Colorado. Once she first put hands and feet on rock, she couldn't stop seeking the vertical while spurning gravity. She's taken her lumps, even hitting her head against the rock in a recent climb that left an ugly gash on her forehead. But despite the blows, she keeps ascending. Now she's a national inspiration.

This story got me thinking about our own strenuous discipleship. Like climbing, the spiritual life is a fight against a strong force pulling us down, an ongoing battle against destructive attractions of selfish and sensual desires. Believers who have been on "the climb" for a while know that just as the law of *physical gravity* never wavers, neither does the law of *fleshly gravity*. It's always tugging on us.

However, in another sense, the spiritual life is an easy, light climb because of a superior gravity, a gracious one, that hauls believers up. We'll explore this spiritual gravity that draws us Godward in the next block, starting at 9:00 AM. For now, praise the Saving King with a favorite Christmas hymn, "Joy to the World." You probably know it by heart, but if not, please find it on the internet.



Phil. 3:14 (printed on the previous page), is a Christian-life handbook in 18 words. First, we learn that discipleship is an *individual* endeavor (*"I press on"*), not just a group one. Notice the first-person pronoun. It takes personal commitment with an "attack mentality" like Emily Harrington. Notice the verb *"press."* It really means to chase down or hunt. Paul writes elsewhere that like any serious athlete, he's strict with himself (*"I discipline by body"* — 1 Cor. 9:27) because he wants to win.

Second, there's an identifiable summit (*"toward the goal"*). The rock face has an edge. We just can't see it through the mist. Someday, Jesus will appear out of heaven and renew our bodies and subdue his enemies. For reaching the top, Emily got congratulations and endorsement details. Our prize is better. We get Christ and an endless world of glory, honor and immortality.

Third, there's an enabling (*"the upward call of God"*). This is the superior gravity I was talking about on the previous page. In the Bible, "call" refers to God's privilege-awarding invitation to significance and responsibility. It's not just a summons either, it's a suction. So, yes, we pull up, but only in conjunction with an upward gravitational pull, the strong force he exerts upon his his A-Listers. That's the "call."

Fourth, there's an Enabler (*"in Christ Jesus"*). Paul writes that we experience this upward gravitational thrust through our Saving King. The little word *"in"* is very significant. It means to be in the closest possible association with Jesus. Think of being roped and harnessed to the King of Climbing. Regarding kingship, observe that his Messianic title is first. The gift of "going up" comes through the One who came, lived, died (notice the nail hole in his palm) and rose. In summary, God is pulling you into his kingdom through the ministry of his slain, raised and reigning Son Jesus. He *"makes [our] feet like the deer's; he makes [us] tread on...high places"* (Hab. 3:19). Again, that gracious gravity overcomes the weak tug of the flesh. So, step, reach and pull with all your might. Give him praise with "Hark! the Herald, Angels Sing."

1 Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King:
peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with th'angelic hosts proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Refrain:
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn King"

2 Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of the Virgin's womb:
veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail th'incarnate Deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel. [Refrain]

3 Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings,
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth,
born to give us second birth.
[Refrain]

BETWEEN 12:00-3:00 PM: PRIESTS DON'T JUST PASS BY



You remember Jesus' story of the "Mensch from the Mountain Country"? That is, our Lord's tale of that despised but honorable Samaritan. (Femi Olumofin gave a great devotional on him at a past Joel Moment.) You can review the story by looking up Luke 10:25-37. Before this unnamed person stopped to help the poor traveler who had been jumped by robbers, two religious types didn't lift a finger but rather walked right on by. You can see them in background of the picture to the right. Jesus specifies that the first person who made himself scarce when the need arose was a "priest" (Luke 11:31).

As those called by God to participate in the New Covenant, we have a Priest of Compassion, and are consecrated for compassionate priesthood. We must extend this care to the hurting and despised outside of our church family. That's why the **"Just Love As I"** team is getting rolling. Members of the team helped out last Saturday at Maranatha Church's Toy Drive. However, it goes without saying that priests must minister to the members of our own tribe. Thus, we must never pass by on the "other side" of the quad.

That's why we're encouraging all of us to make phone calls to those in our church family whom we sense might be "*stripped*" of joy and "*beat[en]*" up by life in this COVID climate (Luke 10:30). Who will you call during this three-hour block? You can't reach out to every single one, but you can rally the spirits of one. Choose one name that is inscribed on your two shoulder stones. If this means nothing to you, please check out the Prayer Guide for December 9 available at valleychurch.org. Click on "Joel Moment."



BETWEEN 3:00 PM—4:00 PM: Join the Joel Moment Prayer Gathering. Go to Zoom.com and enter Meeting ID and Password.



COBY YOUNG [We'll hear Scripture about our Heavenly Father's Gracious Gravity.]

Phil. 3:7 *But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

Phil. 3:8 *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ*

Phil. 3:9 *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—*

Phil. 3:10 *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*

Phil. 3:11 *that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Phil. 3:12 *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.*

Phil. 3:13 *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,*

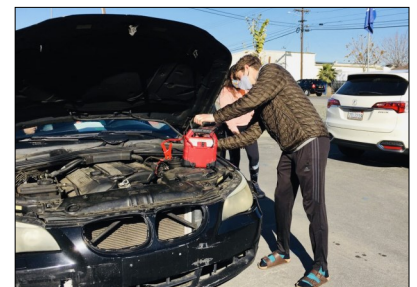
Phil. 3:14 *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

.....

Phil. 3:20 *But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

Phil. 3:21 *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.*

CALEB HOWE [We'll hear from this guy in the picture to the right. He's helping someone at last week's toy drive at Maranatha Christian Center. God seized Caleb, harnessed him to himself through his Son Jesus, and said "Climb, because I'm pulling you up." He'll share about his life and Lord.]





GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #1 (7 min.): 2Th. 2:14 *To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Give God praise, thanks, affirmation and whatever other words of commendation you can think of because he “called” you. If you believe in Jesus, you’re special, privileged and enrolled. Praise God because he grabbed you through the Gospel. We’re sweet and pleasing to God, even if the world thinks we’re an offensive odor.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #2 (7 min.): Eph. 4:1 *therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.*

With these special privileges and advantages come individual and group responsibilities to play important roles. That’s why it’s possible for us to live *down* to corruption, rather than *up* to our calling. Pray that everyone at Valley Church would match his or her calling with a corresponding response of courageous faith and self-giving love.

GROUP PRAYER PROMPT #3 (7 min.): Col. 3:23 *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord...”*

Pick a category or two from the list of jobs below. Then ask God to strengthen his people in that field. Pray that they’ll carry out their vocational callings in ways that make Jesus appealing to outsiders: Airline Pilot, Flight Attendant, TSA Officer, Actor, Architect, Artist, Musician, Accountant, Administrative Assistant, COO, Consultant, Financial Adviser, HR Person, Investment Banker, Professor, Teacher, Border Patrol Agent, Police Officer, Homemaker, Psychologist, Paramedic, Bank Teller, Hair Stylist, Retail Worker, Waiter, Web Developer, Maintenance Director, Sales, Computer Programmer and Military.

BETWEEN 5:00 PM-10:00 PM: WINNING THE ONE WHO WON US OVER

Did you know that we can *re-pray*, that is, adopt the prayers of others, and by doing so, increase our own love and desire for God? Originality in prayer is nice but not necessary. Here’s an excerpt from Augustine’s *Confessions*, a book-long prayer. It fits today’s theme and makes for good evening praise:

“Bring to me a sweetness surpassing all the seductive delights which I pursued. Enable me to love you with all my strength that I may clasp your hand with all my heart. That is the authentic happy life, to set one’s joy on you, grounded in you and caused by you. That is the real thing, and there is no other.”

Do you need another gospel-themed song to keep your Christmas joy flowing? Try “In Bethlehem” by Dave Barnes. You can find it on YouTube. Just search for “Dave Barnes -- In Bethlehem.” This is the image that should come up.

