

Week Four - *Crushing Potential*
Philippians 3:3-15

Spend FIFTEEN - Day One

1. As a parent, what would be your highest aspiration for your children? If you are not a parent, what hopes did your parents communicate to you for your life?
2. What cultural values do those hopes reveal?
3. How does our culture define success?
4. Read what Jewish culture valued as important in Paul's ironic boast in Philippians 3:4-6. What kinds of things mattered in Paul's day?
5. Based on the context, how easy do you think it was to accomplish and embody everything Paul listed? What might be equivalent boasts for us in our culture today?
6. Now read the next part of Paul's letter, Philippians 3:7-9. How do these earthly accomplishments compare to Paul's accomplishment of faith in Christ?
7. How easy is it for you to keep earthly success in its proper context compared to your faith?
8. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer, asking Christ through His Holy Spirit to help remind you of the things that truly matter - the things that will last throughout eternity.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Two

9. We've talked about the difference between earthly success and faith. But don't we want to be successes as Christians, too? What do you think it would look like to have successful faith?
10. Here's another way to think about this question: What do you think God's expectations are for you?
11. If the highest achievement of faith is going to heaven, then what are the requirements? (See John 3:16 and John 6:28-29.)
12. Now read Ephesians 2:4-9. What good works do we need to do in order to be saved?

13. What does it take for us to be seen as righteous in God's sight? Go to 2 Corinthians 5:21 for help with this answer.
14. How are these truths comforting or discouraging in your own faith journey?
15. Finish your FIFTEEN by giving thanks for the wonderful truth that there is nothing more for you to achieve in your saving relationship with Him.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Three

16. We learned yesterday that when it comes to achieving our potential before God, Jesus Christ has accomplished everything on our behalf. Does this let us off the hook for trying to achieve full potential in our faith? Why or why not?
17. If our good works don't get us into heaven, what might be the point of good works?
18. When it comes to reaching our potential in faith, we don't do it for the goal of our own benefit, but for the benefit of others around us: our children; friends; coworkers and those who don't know the love Jesus has for them. So, what would a faith that achieves this potential look like?
19. Martin Luther describes a journey for reaching our spiritual potential. It has three steps: prayer, meditation and temptation. Here is his description of the first step: "But kneel down in your little room [Matt. 6:6] and pray to God with real humility and earnestness, that he through his dear Son may give you his Holy Spirit, who will enlighten you, lead you, and give you understanding." What does Matthew 6:6 say that we should do?
20. Why do you think this is the first step for achieving spiritual potential?
21. Who is the one whose power we rely on for this first step?
22. Use your FIFTEEN to start toward achieving your spiritual potential right now by praying for God to send you His Holy Spirit and ask boldly for the gifts that the Spirit brings.

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Four

23. When you hear the word "meditation," what images or ideas come to your mind?
24. The second step on our spiritual journey is meditation. Hear what Martin Luther has to say about it: "You should meditate, that is, not only in your heart, but also externally, by repeating the written words externally and rubbing them like an herb for its flavor, reading and rereading them with diligent attention and reflection, so that you may see

what the Holy Spirit means by them.... Thus you see in [Psalm 119] how David constantly boasts that he will talk, meditate, speak, sing, hear, read, by day and night and always, about nothing except God's Word and commandments." Look at those verbs. Which ones do you regularly practice in your own engagement with Scripture?

25. Why do you think Luther makes a point that we need to say the words out loud - "externally" - instead of just reading them silently to ourselves? (If you struggle with this answer, go to Romans 10:17. What is the means by which faith comes?)
26. Now turn to Psalm 119:9-16. What examples does this passage give for meditating on God's Word? How do they match what Luther recommends?
27. Pick one of the verses from Psalm 119:9-16 that strikes you. Repeat it aloud a few times. If you're in an isolated place, maybe try yelling it at the top of your lungs. Or whisper it several times. How does this change how you hear the verse from when you simply read it the first time?
28. Write down this verse and put it somewhere where you will see it several times a day: on your bathroom mirror, on your car dashboard, at your work station. Commit to saying it out loud several times per day—every time you see it.
29. Close your FIFTEEN in prayer by asking, with real humility and earnestness, for God's Holy Spirit to come to you and guide you as you meditate on his Word!

Spend FIFTEEN - Day Five

30. Do you think temptation affects Christians more when they are new believers or when they are more mature in the faith? What made you go with that answer?
31. Martin Luther has a surprising third step in maximizing a believer's potential: temptation. He meant this in the sense of "being attacked or assaulted." Why would that be the final step of spiritual growth?
32. This is what Luther said about temptation: A maturing believer will be the victim of "all kinds of enemies, arrogant princes or tyrants, false spirits and factions, whom he must tolerate because he meditates, that is, because he is occupied with God's Word (as has been said) in all manner of ways. For as soon as God's Word takes root and grows in you, the devil will harry you, and will make a real [theologian] of you, and by his assaults will teach you to seek and love God's Word." How would assaults make you love God's Word more?
33. Read Psalm 119:145-152. How does this passage match Luther's three steps of prayer, meditation, and temptation"?
34. Unfortunately, the sign of a believer who is achieving her potential is not necessarily earthly success and blessing, but being attacked. Why do you think attack follows an attempt to meditate on God's Word?

35. How have you responded to attacks in your own life? How can you change your understanding and reception of those in the future?

36. Conclude your FIFTEEN by praying that God's Holy Spirit would fill you with His presence and prepare you for the assaults that are sure to come as you attempt to achieve your faith potential.