

Press on to Win the Prize

Philippians 3:12-16

Online Sermon:

http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567

Ever since Christ took hold us and we became born again the Holy Spirit has been encouraging us to grow in our spiritual walk with the Lord. While we have experienced many times in our lives in which we have walked by the still waters and have



had faith as tiny as a mustard seed that has moved mighty mountains, we must confess that there are other times in our lives in which our motivation to be more like Christ is at best lukewarm and often outright

nonexistent! Even though the words of Christ, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5) ring so very true in our minds for some reason they seem not to make a profound difference in our hearts and our actions! Complacency is the enemy of all spiritual growth, and it occurs

in our lives for a variety of reasons.¹ For some Christians they have accomplished so very much in God’s kingdom that they have stopped trying to grow because they believe there is nothing left for them to attain! For others the opposite is true, they have sinned so gravely that they have chosen to sit on the kingdom racetrack because they believe they are too wicked to be chosen by God to serve any more! For others they have merely stopped looking at the finish line and due to loving the things and ways of this world have chosen to chase after them rather than a better relationship with their Lord. And yet for others in their old age they believe that there simply is not enough time left in their lives to become more like Jesus! In today’s passage Apostle Paul addressed these fallacies by boldly telling the Philippians that the “One” thing that had and always would motivate him was to know and live his life worthy of the Gospel of Christ.

Before you read this sermon take inventory of your spiritual hunger to know Christ and as you dive into the words the Lord has given me pray that God will open your heart, mind, and soul to become and remain passionate to be more like Him.

¹ I believe this quote came from Richard Foster.

My Humble Acknowledgement

Though Christ had seized him on the road to Damascus,² “hand picked him to be an Apostle unto the Gentiles,” got him



to write His inspired words and enabled him to be a “tremendous soulwinner and preacher of the Word;”³ Paul boldly and humbly admitted that he had not yet arrived or obtained perfection

(3:12)! While striving for “perfection through intellectual and spiritual enlightenment was a common religious ideal in Greco-Roman antiquity,”⁴ so was the tendency for Christians to

become complacent in their passion to live a life worthy of the Gospel (1:27)!⁵ Unlike his previous prideful attitude that he was “faultless as to righteousness based on the Law (3:6),”⁶ Paul warned the Philippians of the dangers of believing that “absolute perfection could ever be obtained by a single experience;”⁷ even when it was a Spirit led conversion from death to life! Paul told the church of Corinth that he only saw as “a reflection in a mirror” and only knew some things about Christ, but one day he would “fully know” Him (1 Corinthians 13:12).⁸ While knowing the “incomprehensible greatness of Christ is unattainable” it was Paul’s lifetime of arduous inquiry!⁹ It is a “prayer of humble dissatisfaction”¹⁰ with one’s current level of knowledge and spiritual maturity in Christ that spurs one unto seeking and being transformed more into Christlikeness every day! Is this not why Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6)?¹¹ Paul was also warning the Philippians to not put him or anyone else so high on a pedestal that none of them

² Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 94.

³ Alan Carr, [“Running for the Prize \(Philippians 3:12–16\),”](#) in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 3010.

⁴ Clinton E. Arnold, [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon](#), vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 361.

⁵ Robert Rainy, [“The Epistle to the Philippians,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible: Ephesians to Revelation*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll, vol. 6, Expositor’s Bible (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton Co., 1903), 164.

⁶ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 249.

⁷ A.T. Robertson, [Word Pictures in the New Testament](#) (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Php 3:12.

⁸ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 251.

⁹ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 250.

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 146.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 146.

dare try and follow in his footsteps. Each person is called by Christ to live “out their days on earth purposefully”¹² through the daily surrendering of “I” in self to let Christ live more within them. God uses the lowly ordinary people to do great things in His kingdom (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Instead of comparing our “incompleteness” to others apparent perfection and becoming bewildered and quitting on seeking God, like Paul we are to run all the harder towards God with our hearts wide open in faith realizing that “I can do all things through Him who gives me strength (4:13) for “divine grace is the source and goal of the human pursuit!”¹³

Reflection. Do you feel like you are in a place in your life that you are spiritually mature? If so, how has this misleading assumption affected your passion to grow in Christ? Do you often compare yourself to other Christians and foolishly conclude that they are closer to God than you can ever possibly obtain? Has this led you to give up on your pursuit of God? If our closeness to God is both a product of our faith but mostly His grace, then are you saying that God has given up on you and if so then why did God say “He works for the good to those who

¹² Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 94.

love Him” (Romans 8:28) and draw nearer to Him and He will draw nearer to you (James 4:8)? Think about it!

The Passion for Christ

After having told the Philippians that he had not already attained perfection in Christ, Paul boldly stated that the goal of the rest of his life was to “press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (3:12b). With his circumcision,



impeccable Israelite heritage, Hebrew of Hebrews title, Pharisaic traditions, righteousness based on the law (3:5-6), and arrest letters from the high priest Paul headed to Damascus to “arrest any there

who belonged to the Way” (Acts 9:2). As Paul approached Damascus “the mighty hand of Christ reached down, seized him by the scruff of his robe, and set him on the path to Ananias’s house and then to Arabia and then to the Gentile world as its

¹³ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 252.

great apostle!¹⁴ Christ took hold of Paul on that day and saved him for a purpose of which Paul took so seriously that he “would not be satisfied until he had apprehended that for which he had been apprehended.”¹⁵ The risen Christ had “mightily arrested him and set his life in a new direction”¹⁶ that was radically different than the one he was previously on! No longer was Paul under sin and the law arrogantly waving papers of persecution for those who were truly circumcised! Paul rejoiced he was no longer a Pharisee but a born-again believer, preacher, teacher and Apostle of the One who atoned for his sin! Paul told the Philippians that “he was running a race; he has not yet breasted the tape or won the prize”¹⁷ to accomplish all that Christ wanted him to do nor was he “perfectly found in Him”¹⁸ either in knowledge or transformation. So, with the “tension of salvation begun but not yet final” and with the full acknowledgement that dim eyes and his new heart of flesh was constantly being opened and sanctified; Paul told the Philippians he was rejoicing in the privilege through faith and by grace to press on towards meeting the goal for his life for which Christ seized his very life!

Reflection. If you have been seized by Christ, are you “living in the grip of His grace with a hot, grasping pursuit of an ever-deeper knowledge of Him?”¹⁹ You are not your own but have been bought at the price of Christ’s very life! Surely as a born-

again masterpiece of God’s grace, you want to live your life worthy of the Gospel of Christ! While it is easier to be sleeping giants, neither hot nor cold in His kingdom; surely you are not satisfied with the status quo but have abundant passion to seek and obey the very purpose in which Christ saved you for in the first place? Do you not know that you participate in the divine nature, have the mind of Christ, have God’s Spirit living inside of you, and have been granted spiritual gifts to accomplish His goals in His kingdom?

Dare we ever think we already have attained perfection or have served our Lord enough then I pray the Lord take seize of us again and put us back onto the passionate, right path of seeking Him while He might be found and receiving His loving transformative touch that we so desperately need to spiritually grow and become more like Him!

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 147.

¹⁵ Alan Carr, “[Running for the Prize \(Philippians 3:12–16\)](#),” in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 3011.

¹⁶ Peter Thomas O’Brien, [The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 425.

¹⁷ F. F. Bruce, [Philippians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody, MA: Baker Books, 2011), 120.

¹⁸ Peter Thomas O’Brien, [The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 421–422.

¹⁹ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 147.

My Passion to Know Christ

“On August 7, 1954, during the British Empire Games in Vancouver, Canada, the greatest mile-run matchup ever took place. It was touted as the “miracle mile” because Britisher Roger Bannister and Australian John Landy were the only two



sub-four-minute milers in the world. Bannister had been the first man ever to run a four-minute mile. Both runners were in peak condition. I remember as a junior high boy carefully turning the pages, examining the photos of the famous runners in *Life* magazine, and absorbing the statistics and predictions. Roger Bannister, M.D., who became Sir Roger Bannister and master of an Oxford college, strategized that he would relax during the third lap and save everything for his finishing drive. But as they began that third lap, the Australian poured it on, stretching his already substantial lead.

Immediately Bannister adjusted his strategy, increasing his pace and gaining on Landy.

The lead was quickly cut in half, and at the bell for the final lap they were even. Landy began running even faster, and Bannister followed suit. Both men were flying. Bannister felt he was going to lose if Landy did not slow down. Then came the famous moment (replayed thousands of times in print and flickering black and white celluloid) as at the last stride before the home stretch the crowds roared. Landy could not hear Bannister’s footfall and looked back, a fatal lapse of concentration. Bannister launched his attack and won the Empire Games that day by five yards.”²⁰

If the Philippians were to run and win the race set before them by Christ their Lord then Paul said there is but one thing they must do, “forget what is behind and strain towards what is ahead” (3:13b)! Forgetting for Paul was not “a passive loss of memory; no, its an active, continuous discipline of the mind and heart”²¹ by which one chooses to keep one’s failures and successes from enticing one to become complacent in one’s spiritual walk with the Lord. While learning from the past

²⁰ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 148.

²¹ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 254.

is incredibly valuable,²² when dwelled upon it can so entangle a believer that they can barely crawl in God’s kingdom. If Paul never took his eyes off his pre-Damascus sinful pride in human



salvation and his subsequent persecution of the early church, Paul could have easily and foolishly come to believe that he was indeed too damaged of goods²³ to serve the Lord, especially as an emissary to the

Gentiles! God wants us to seek His forgiveness when we sin, and by strength and might of His Spirit, forget, and get back into the race of pleasing Him! But is not just our past mistakes Paul tells the Philippians to forget but also their past successes! Paul easily could have let his “ring of established churches, shining as lights across the darkness of Asia and Europe,”²⁴ his special revelations received from the Lord and astute theological writings²⁵ lull him into a sense of complacency,²⁶

²² Paul Barnett, [Philippians & Philemon: Joy in the Lord](#), ed. Paul Barnett, Reading the Bible Today Series (Sydney, South NSW: Aquila Press, 2016), 95.

²³ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 152.

²⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 149.

²⁵ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 253–254.

but instead he pressed on, running even more fervently. Paul refused to “grow smug and self-righteous and live in his glory days.”²⁷ Paul also refused to compare himself to others who were running the race.

*The believer’s passion to run in God’s race is not to be influenced by those who outrun you, lag behind you, or have altogether dropped out of the race!*²⁸

Living in a pleasure-seeking world such as ours there will always be a thousand things competing for our attention.²⁹ To attain the goal of living a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ one must become single-minded in one’s “thoughts, emotions, and decisions,” always straining to do the only thing that truly

²⁶ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 150.

²⁷ Tony Merida and Francis Chan, [Exalting Jesus in Philippians](#), ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 153.

²⁸ Alan Carr, [“Running for the Prize \(Philippians 3:12–16\),”](#) in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 3012.

²⁹ Alan Carr, [“Running for the Prize \(Philippians 3:12–16\),”](#) in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 3011.

matters, pleasing the Lord!³⁰ “Progress in the faith requires stretching beyond past and present accomplishments and reaching out to seize every opportunity to grow in faith!”³¹

Reflection. “The tyranny of urgent needs, the clamor of popular voices, the top news of the day all takes a pale second place to the one overarching goal” of living for Jesus.³² Are you living for yourself or for Christ? Are you remembering your past sins and using them as an excuse to not run in God’s kingdom? Instead of foolishly thinking sin disqualifies you from serving, repent and produce fruit while in the Vine! Have past injustices got you bitter because you are unable to forgive others? Are you using presumed “spiritual superiority” of others as an excuse to serve God despite knowing you are gifted by the Holy Spirit to accomplish the assigned, divine goal God has given you?

Pressing On

Lord, may we press on toward the goal of winning the prize for which for which God has called us heavenward in Your Name (3:14)! May we not become so enamored with our past sin that we give up in defeat nor may we become so enamored

³⁰ Alan Carr, “[Running for the Prize \(Philippians 3:12–16\)](#),” in *The Sermon Notebook: New Testament* (Lenoir, NC: Alan Carr, 2015), 3011.

³¹ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 255.

with our spiritual successes in life that we are foolishly lulled into thinking we have already arrived at perfection. May we not allow our age dimmish our desire to serve, for it is by Your grace, strength, and mercy that the branches in the vine produce fruit! Instead, when our eyes get dim, and our bodies start to fail



and can see the finish line but within our grasp, may we plunge forward with great fervency to attain the promised crowns of righteousness

that we did not earn yet but by faith in Your atoning sacrifice will one day receive. Lord may we not go beyond Your glorious Gospel message, for it was by grace that we have been saved through faith! And Lord when the seas of doubt rise because of the vast valleys of trials, tribulations, and persecution that we often travel through in this world that is not our home, may we not be discouraged but instead echo the words of Apostle Paul, “but by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect” (1 Corinthians 15:9). Draw us I pray

³² G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 253.

Lord deeper and deeper into our knowledge of You and may we never stop asking for Your grace and mighty power to continue to transform us into the image into which we were formed. May Your ambassadors and royal priests not take for granite the spiritual blessings we have received but instead may Thy will be done in our lives for Your honor and glory! And finally Lord may we press on with eager anticipation of the future prize of spending an eternity with you with the assurance that those who seek You will be found and those who ask in Your glorious name will receive every day the crumb from Your table needed to redeem, sustain, transform, and enable us to passionately run in Your kingdom for Your honor and glory, Amen! Praise be to God I am forever a citizen of heaven, Your servant and child!