**PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL**

Philippians 3:12-21

Key Verse 14

“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

**Introduction**



A little child is a perfect human being, but still is far from perfect in his development as a grown man. Likewise we are the true children of God and are perfect thanks to the new born status in and through Jesus Christ. We have the Holy Spirit as our deposit for eternity, we are yet perfect in all the stages of our development in faith as shown in the brain development diagram on the left. In the previous passage, Paul really wanted to know Christ by participating in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death and attaining to the resurrection from the dead. In today’s passage, he continues to share his life-goal. He then encourages the Philippians to follow his example. Through his passage, let us refresh our life-goal in Jesus Christ.

1. Read verses 12-13a. What did Paul say about his goal? (12a, 13a) For what did Paul press on? (12b)

1-1, Read verses 12-13a.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. **13** Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.

1-2, What did Paul say about his goal? (12a, 13a)

***Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.***

* Just as a race has a starting line and a finish line, so does our life. It is the same with the race of faith.
* The spiritual finish line may be equivalent to our life goal. We must know the right life goal that Christ set out for us.
* Many Christians don’t know their goal in life, but run aimlessly. Later they will reach a point where they ask themselves why they are running.
* Our life goal is to gain Christ, becoming like him in every area of our life. It is not to have something but to become someone.



* For instance, we remember the life goal of a rich young man in the gospel story. Outwardly his goal was to have eternal life.
* But his real life goal was revealed when Jesus asked him to sell all his possessions, to give it to the poor, and also to follow Jesus. Upon hearing what Jesus said, the man went away from Jesus, sad.
* His real life goal was to be wealthy on earth. But the disciples of Jesus whose life goal was to know Jesus and to become like him ran their race of faith to the end.
* We must have a clear Christian life goal to know and become like Jesus. Let us reset our life-goal to be Christ-centered and to become more like Jesus.
* Paul had a clear life goal which was to win the prize for which God had called him heavenward in Christ Jesus.
* He knew that he was in a spiritual race. He knew that he had begun his race after receiving the forgiveness of his sins through Jesus. He knew he had received apostleship to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.
* Paul was now old and imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. But he confessed that he had not already obtained all or arrived at his goal.
* He was still running hard to take hold of it. He was still pressing on and straining toward what is ahead.
* He was still doing one to one Bible study with the Roman prison guards with all his heart. He was still praying with tears for the gospel work around the world.
* But he confessed that he had not arrived at his goal yet. What was his goal? **His life goal was to become like Christ.**
* According to 3:10, he said, “…becoming like him in his death…” He also said in Romans 8:29a, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son…”

1-3, For what did Paul press on? (12b)

***but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.***

* “I press on,” is present tense. Paul meant, “I am still running,” or “I am still struggling hard.” He ran and struggled hard just like a marathon runner, running onward with hope to win the prize.

Luke 9:62 reads,

Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

* Likewise, “I press on” meant that Paul had put his hand to the plow and refused to look back. In Hebrews 11, many faithful servants refused to go back their homeland.
* Paul always kept the finish line in his view. He kept running toward the finish line without stopping or even slowing down.
* No doubt, he was a human with weaknesses and sins. How then could he run to the end? Paul confessed the secret in Philippians 4:13, saying, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”
* He also said in Romans 8:26, “…the Spirit helps us in our weakness.” Paul could run to the end by the help of the Holy Spirit.
* Our Savior Jesus is alive. And he helps us and guides us to reach the goal with his Spirit when we struggle to run the race of faith.

***but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.***

* Paul realized that Christ who called him had a goal for him that was to be like Jesus. So Paul made Christ’s goal his own life goal. Christ who called us has a goal for us.
* That I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me: Paul pressed on for what Jesus wanted. His effort was put forth to do God’s will, not his.



* Paul wants to grasp a ball and take hold of it, like a Super Bowl football player who not only wants to catch it, but wants to pull it down and make it his own.”
* Jesus laid hold of Paul to make him a new man ([Romans 6:4](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom%206.4))
* Jesus laid hold of Paul to conform him into the image of Jesus Christ ([Romans 8:29](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom%208.29))
* Jesus laid hold of Paul to make him a witness ([Acts 9:15](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%209.15)) – so Paul would lay hold of both the experience of Jesus and to testify of that experience.
* Jesus laid hold of Paul to make him an instrument in the conversion of others ([Acts 9:15](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%209.15))
* Jesus laid hold of Paul to bring him into suffering ([Acts 9:16](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%209.16))
* Jesus laid hold of Paul that so that the Apostle might attain to the resurrection from the dead ([Philippians 3:11](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Phil%203.11))



* Christians are people who pursue the goal that Jesus set for us. They are straining toward what is ahead by the help of the Holy Spirit.
* When a wealthy and bright Yale University student William Borden was called by God to serve the Chinese people, about a century ago, his heart went out to many Muslims in China.
* After completing his studies at the university, he left his promising career and his country America, setting sail for China. He stopped in Egypt to learn Arabic to better serve Muslims in China.
* But during his stay there, he contracted meningitis and died, not making it to China. After his death, a note was found in his Bible that summarized his life: “No reserve, no retreat, no regrets.”
* In this regard, we are richly blessed in that there are so many servants in UBF like Dr. Samuel Lee and Mother Sarah Barry.
* We are praying for young people to press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of them.
* May the Lord richly bless our upcoming Spring Bible conference so that we may raise many young believers as God’s servants like the apostle Paul.

2. Read verses 13b-14. What was the “one thing” Paul did? What is the prize? What can we learn from Paul’s attitude to attain this prize?

2-1, Read verses 13b-14.

But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

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2-2, What was the “one thing” Paul did?

***“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”***

* Paul was focused on one thing and would not let those things which are behind distract him from it. He pressed on toward the goal to win the prize.
* We often let those things which are behind distract us, whether they be good things or bad things. Looking at what is in the past often keeps us from what God has in store for us in the future.
* It is a deception to live either in the past or in the future. God wants us to press on in the present, because the present is where eternity touches us now.
* Paul knew that a race is won only in the present moment, not in the past or in the future.
* I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus: The prize is the upward call of God.
* Here Paul show the way we should run. He forgot what was behind and was straining toward what is ahead.
* Paul didn’t mean that he forgot God’s saving grace and what God had done for him and for the sinful world. We should remember God’s grace again and again and give thanks to him always.
* Paul meant that he forgot what he had done, whether good or bad. As a fruitful missionary, Paul had served the great works of God. He had raised many great spiritual leaders and pioneered many churches.
* He had written letters that became the New Testament. He had been imprisoned for the sake of Jesus’ gospel. He had made a tremendous impact on the world.
* So looking back on what he had done, he could have said, “I am done. Look how far I have come. Now it’s the time to pass the baton to others and rest.” But he said, “Forgetting what is behind.”
* Paul also forgot his past sins, failures and mistakes. Suppose he didn’t forget his sin of giving his approval to stone Stephen a man of God and of arresting and persecuting Christians.
* Suppose he didn’t forget his past failures or mistakes such as conflicts with coworkers and some other mistakes. Then he would have lived in regret, guilt and grief.
* But he was not crippled by the memories of the past. He forgot what was behind. Instead he said, “Press on toward” or “Strain toward what is ahead.”
* He didn’t live in the past. He didn’t waste his time on what was behind. What was behind was gone. Of course, he learned from the past and then he moved on.
* He let go of his guilt, shame, grudge and grief in Christ. He was struggling at his present for his future.
* Paul’s way to run his race of faith reminds us of God’s words in Isaiah 43:18-19, “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”
* It is as if God is saying to us through the Prophet Isaiah, “Forget the past and see what I am doing in the lives of people today and so strain toward what is ahead.”
* But in our human nature, we tend to forget things we should remember and remember things we should forget.
* In regard to forgetting what is behind, there are always two kinds of people in the church: those who can’t forget their past glory, constantly dwelling in memories of the ‘good old days.’ Then there are those who can’t let go of their past failures, mistakes, and sins, living in constant regret, incompetence, and defeatism.
* Satan makes use of our past to paralyze us. But we must know that we cannot go back to our past. Our longings and cravings can’t bring us back to the glorious past. Our tears, self-pity, or regret can’t change our shameful past either.
* The important thing is to win our race after crossing the finish line. We should neither fall into complacency and pride because of past successes, nor weep over past failures and mistakes.
* *To be real winners we must press on today and finish the race without quitting.*

2-3, What is the prize?

2-4, What can we learn from Paul’s attitude to attain this prize?

***I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”***

* The prize is the call itself, not the benefits that come from the call or any other tangible thing. The prize is being able to the fact that we can run the race at all, working with God as a partner to do the work of His kingdom.
* The upward call of God in Christ Jesus: As everything else, this upward call of God is only in Christ Jesus.
* The legalists might say they followed the upward call of God, but they certainly didn’t do it in Christ Jesus; instead they did it in the efforts of their own flesh.

3. Read verses 15-17. What view should mature Christians have? (15a) How did God help those who thought otherwise? (15b) How did Paul encourage the Philippians to live? (16-17)

3-1, Read verses 15-17.

All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. **16** Only let us live up to what we have already attained. **17** Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

3-2, What view should mature Christians have? (15a)

***All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things.***

* Here Paul believed that mature Christians are those who have the same view of things that he had, that is to set the clear life goal to know Christ and press on toward the goal forgetting what is behind.
* It was in fact Jesus’ view and Paul followed Jesus’ example. That is why he also said to the Philippians to follow his example.

3-3, How did God help those who thought otherwise? (15b)

***And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.***

* Paul had great trust in the ability of the Lord to deal with His own people. He didn’t have the attitude that if he failed to convince them, they would then never be convinced.

3-4, How did Paul encourage the Philippians to live? (16-17)

***Only let us live up to what we have already attained. 17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.***

* Paul continue to encourage us to be confident in living by faith to the end!
* The words, “follow”, “model”, and “example” show that our race is not a single race. Rather we are blessed to have role models to learn and follow until the finish line.
* May the Lord help us to become examples for others. Amen.

4. Read verses 18-21. Who did Paul warn the Philippians about? (18) What characterizes enemies of the cross of Christ? (19) What is our identity? (20a) Who are we eagerly awaiting? (20b) What will Jesus do when he comes? (21)

4-1, Read verses 18-21.

For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. **20** But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

4-2, Who did Paul warn the Philippians about? (18)

* At that time the Philippian church faced 2 kinds of false teachers: legalists who insisted physical circumcision according to the law (3:2) and antinomians who claimed that Christians didn’t need any law of God, for they were in God’s grace.
* These antinomians declared that it didn’t matter what they did because God would forgive anyway. So they committed sin freely and were just like godless people.
* They argued that they didn’t need any further discipline or effort. Simply speaking they didn’t like the cross and participation in Christ’s suffering.
* They didn’t know that without the cross there is no Christianity. So Paul called them “the enemies of the cross of Christ.”
* Paul urged the Philippians with tears, because their hope was earth bound.

4-3, What are the characteristics of the enemies of the cross of Christ? (19)

***Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.***

Background)

* Paul deals with two enemies of the gospel: legalism and antinomianism.
* In the previous lesson(verses 1-11), Paul warned the Philippians about legalism by using very strong language: dogs, evildoers, mutilators of the flesh.
* They were the circumcision group. They didn’t deny Jesus’ death and resurrection, but they advocated that Jesus was not enough for salvation.
* They claimed that it was necessary to keep the Law of Moses according to the everlasting covenant. (too much in favor of the legalism and the law)
* So they insisted that their own works were a necessary part of salvation. Paul strongly opposed this. He taught that we can be saved only by faith alone.
* Our efforts to be righteous are like filthy rags before God. Jesus is sufficient for salvation; we need only Jesus, nothing else.
* So Paul considered everything a loss and even garbage compared to knowing Christ. He had a master passion to know Christ and become like Him.

* Here Paul deals with the other enemy of the gospel, antinomianism, meaning “against the law.”
* They claim that Christ gives perfect freedom, so they can do what they want, even sin. They say, “God forgives us, no matter what we do.”
* They misuse God’s grace as an excuse to commit sin. Paul warns about them using a different kind of strong language, saying with tears, “many live as enemies of the cross of Christ”.
* These people ignore sanctification. They over-emphasize justification. They don’t like the words “self denial,” “repent,” “grow in the likeness of Christ,” and “take up your cross.”
* Their so-called faith does not impact their practical lives. Their lifestyle is not different than that of worldly people.
* This is why Christians have lost spiritual influence. We need a full acceptance of the gospel.
* The Bible says very clearly that we are saved only by faith, and after that we need to grow to be like Jesus through suffering for the gospel and through the process of sanctification.
* Thus Paul wept because of their final destiny. Their teachings were not based on Biblical truth.   
  Rather they pursued earthly pleasures in a subtle way, thus hating the cross.

4-4, What is our identity? (20a)

***But our citizenship is in heaven.***

* Although the Philippians were geographically far from Rome, they must have greatly valued their Roman citizenship and considered themselves citizens of Rome and were under refined Roman laws and customs.
* Likewise Christians should consider themselves citizens of heaven. While we have to deny ourselves, take up the cross to follow Jesus and His exemplary servants like the Apostle Paul, despite many difficulties, we are more than conquerors.

4-5, Who are we eagerly awaiting? (20b)

***And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,***

* Christians’ citizenship is in heaven and their hope is in the kingdom of God and in Jesus’ second coming.
* We eagerly await a Savior!
* It reminds us of Revelation 20:6 in terms of our finish line when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

“Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”

4-6, What will Jesus do when he comes? (21)

***who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.***

* When Jesus comes again, he will bring everything under his control and will change our perishable body into an imperishable and glorious resurrection body.

**Conclusion**

Paul tells us how to be like Jesus in practical ways. First, set the right life goal; Second, pursue it with the right attitude; and, Third, follow the right examples. Then he tells us to have the right hope. What a glorious hope we have. With this glorious hope, let us press on toward the goal of becoming like Jesus. Today’s passage reminds us of 1 John 3:2-3, “Dear friends,now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John%203#fen-NIV-30582a)] we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. **3** All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.” May we all become runners of faith, resetting our life goal to be like Jesus and press on with the living hope in the kingdom of God. Amen.

**One word: Press on to take hold of what Jesus took hold of us!**