

Session 10

persevering daily

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 3:12—4:1

BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God calls us to press on with all our hearts toward Christlikeness.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will evaluate their life goal and make necessary adjustments.

MEMORY VERSE

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13, 14).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Non-runners run only in emergencies. They take no pleasure in the activity. Runners enjoy it. They have learned to get beyond the overwhelming urge to quit when their breathing becomes labored and their muscles start to scream. They press on. If running competitively, they look to the finish line and the prize that awaits them.
- ☐ Read Philippians 3:12—4:1. Paul used competitive running as an illustration of his Christian life. He pressed on when he felt the urge to quit and live a quiet life as a reasonably paid tentmaker in a comfortable city. He kept going because he wanted to come as close to the finish line as possible before his race was over. His finish line was becoming perfectly Christlike.
- ☐ God might be okay with believers not physically running, but He isn’t okay with believers not spiritually running. That’s why Paul, a strong spiritual runner, invited all believers to run alongside him and even copy his technique. Have you joined the race? What about your learners? This session will encourage you and them to stay moving or get moving.

Session Summary

Paul’s singular focus in life was to live for Christ. Jesus had saved him, and he wished to expend his life on Christ’s behalf. Practically, that meant aiming all his energy and focus toward becoming more like Christ here on earth. He urged the Philippians to join in his earthly race, encouraging them to follow the faithful examples set by himself and other mature believers. He warned them about those who were enemies of the cross who had no impetus to become like Christ. These people lived as citizens of earth. True believers are citizens of Heaven, living on earth but pursuing Christlikeness while anticipating the return of Christ. Paul encouraged the believers to stand fast in their faith as they waited.

Session Starters

Option 1—Running for Your Life

Steps

1. Read the following account.

Dieudonné LaMothe, a Haitian runner, competed in the 1984 Olympics as a marathoner. He finished in 78th place with a time of 2:52:18. That was dead last, but LaMothe didn't despair. He felt very much alive, for he later claimed that Haitian president Jean-Claude Duvalier had threatened to kill him if he didn't complete the race. LaMothe literally ran for his life. Later President Duvalier ran for his life too. In 1986, a national rebellion forced him from power. He fled to France and remained in exile for twenty-five years.

2. Discuss running.

ASK: Do you think you could finish a marathon if your life depended on it?

ASK: What has motivated you to run long distances?

ASK: What would it take for someone to motivate you to run a marathon?

3. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul felt highly motivated to run a marathon of sorts. He ran a spiritual marathon every day of his life. He ran because of what God promised to him at the end of his race. This session will examine Paul's determination and motivation to continue his spiritual race every day.

Option 2—Citizenship Responsibilities

Steps

1. Have your learners list as many responsibilities of U.S. citizens as they can. Check their list against the following list taken from the U.S. government website.

- Support and defend the Constitution.
- Stay informed of the issues affecting your community.
- Participate in the democratic process.
- Respect and obey federal, state, and local laws.
- Respect the rights, beliefs, and opinions of others.
- Participate in your local community.
- Pay income and other taxes honestly, and on time, to federal, state, and local authorities.

- Serve on a jury when called upon.
 - Defend the country if the need should arise.
2. Discuss citizenship responsibilities.
- ASK:** What does your U.S. citizenship mean to you?
- ASK:** Which of the responsibilities do you take seriously?
- ASK:** What responsibilities might you put in a list for citizens of Heaven?
3. Transition to the Bible lesson.
- Paul called on the Philippians, who were citizens of Rome, to live primarily as citizens of Heaven. This session presents his argument and encourages us to take our heavenly citizenship seriously.

Bible Study

I. Focus on Christlikeness (Phil. 3:12–14)

A. Focus with purpose (3:12)

ASK: Do you have a sense of purpose? How does your sense of purpose affect your daily focus?

READ: Philippians 3:12.

Paul approached life with purposeful determination. He didn't simply let life happen to him. He determined to lay hold of Christlikeness. That means he wanted to think and act with Christ's humble mindset—the mindset he described in Philippians 2:5–8. Through the humility of the cross, Christ had apprehended Paul, saving him from the eternal punishment for his sin. So Paul felt compelled to respond by striving to be like his Savior.

Paul wasn't being special or unusual in his focused determination to be like Christ. Rather he was doing what God expects of all believers. God saves us to conform us to the image of His Son in a process called sanctification. Salvation, then, puts us at the starting blocks of the race to become like Christ. God expects all believers to move off the starting blocks.

Paul said he follows after Christlikeness, pressing on in his race. His language suggests he experiences resistance to keep moving forward. Some of that resistance comes from his own heart. Every believer has a fleshly nature that resists living by the Spirit and craves control. Paul denied his flesh and pressed forward.

Paul also received resistance from the world. They punished him

severely at times and threatened to take his life for striving to live like Christ. Paul endured the punishment and faced the threats without wavering. Becoming like Christ meant more to him than any comfort this world could offer.

ASK: What resistances do you face in your desire to become like Christ?

ASK: How do the resistances you face compare to those faced by Paul or Christ?

B. Forget the past (3:13)

READ: Philippians 3:13.

Paul readily admitted that he had not yet arrived at the goal of Christlikeness. He continued, however, to push forward and make progress. Paul's key to progress in his walk with the Lord was to concentrate on "one thing." He forgot the past and focused on his goal of Christlikeness.

Paul's past threatened to derail him in two contrasting ways. First, his past sins threatened to drag him down and discourage him. Before his salvation, Paul hunted and killed Christians. Paul's memory of those awful actions no doubt came flooding back to his mind in the form of accusatory thoughts. Paul met such thoughts with God's grace that was greater than all his past sins (1 Cor. 15:9, 10). Paul did the same with the sins he committed after his salvation.

ASK: What does a refusal to let go of our past sins reveal about our understanding of God's forgiving grace? *It reveals that we believe God's grace wasn't enough and that we must somehow suffer for our sins in order to deserve God's forgiveness.*

Second, Paul's past successes threatened to slow him down in his quest to become like Christ. Paul could look back on his three successful missionary trips, his presentation of the gospel to thousands of people, multiple church plants, countless miracles, surviving a harrowing voyage to Rome, and remaining steadfast in an extended imprisonment.

ASK: Given what Paul had already accomplished in his Christian service, what could he have felt entitled to do once he got out of prison? *Retire! Find a quiet village where he could make tents the rest of his days.*

Paul pressed on despite his past success. He realized his race wasn't over. Good splits mean nothing if a runner doesn't finish his race. Paul had good splits but a long way yet to go. In fact, he made additional missionary trips, perhaps even going as far as Spain before his martyrdom.

C. Press for the prize (3:14–16)

READ: Philippians 3:14.

Paul pressed, or ran with urgency and speed, toward the goal of complete Christlikeness. Becoming Christlike consumed his life. Paul added that his pressing came in response to God's heavenly calling. God set the course and called Paul to the race which has as its end the full realization of Christlikeness in God's presence. "In Christ Jesus" refers to how God made Paul's race and finish possible. When Paul put his faith in Christ, God said, "Get ready, get set, go!" and Paul took off on his quest to grow in Christlikeness, refusing to look back.

READ: Philippians 3:15.

Paul called all believers, including himself, to spiritually mature thinking. He included himself because he had not yet arrived and could not coast along spiritually. Paul had in mind the type of thinking that affects the whole being and moves the will. This thinking would influence the Philippians' whole disposition and direction in life. Paul knew that if the Philippians thought as he did, they would run the race as he did. Their focused thinking would lead to faithful performance.

READ: Luke 18:9–14. **ASK:** How does the publican reflect the mature attitude Paul laid out in Philippians 3:12–14 and called for in verse 15? *The publican knew he hadn't arrived spiritually and need God's mercy. He showed humility and a desire to move forward spiritually.*

In the second half of verse 15, Paul expressed his trust in God to help the Philippians come to the place of understanding and accepting what it means to live a mature Christian life. Some were no doubt already with Paul and showing the mind of Christ while others were still sorting out his teaching and learning to apply it to their lives. Either way, Paul wanted the Philippians to realize God would be working in their hearts. Earlier in his letter, Paul showed his trust in God to change lives when Paul said he regularly prayed for the Philippians to mature in Christ (Phil. 1:9–11).

READ: Philippians 3:16.

Paul ended the section on pressing for the prize by encouraging the Philippians to keep moving forward. They had arrived at certain levels of maturity, but they wouldn't stay there if they stopped pressing for the prize. Instead, they would digress. There is no coasting downhill on the road to spiritual maturity.

Paul used a military term meaning "march in line." Paul meant to "be in line with," referring to living according to the same principle that he followed. He urged the Philippians to move forward in unity. They were partners in the gospel and their spiritual growth.

ASK: Evaluate this statement: Becoming satisfied with strides made toward Christlikeness will cause a believer to slide back in pride. *The statement is true. Thinking we have arrived is strong evidence that we in fact haven't.*

II. Identify Christlike Laborers to Follow (Phil. 3:17–19)

A. Follow sacrificial examples (3:17)

READ: Philippians 3:17.

Paul encouraged the Philippians to look at his life as an example of how to live for the Lord. His counsel wasn't egotistical. He had already made it clear that he counted all the things the average person would glory in as worthless (3:4–10). Paul's goal was to know Christ and His power (3:10, 11). Although he was spiritually mature, Paul knew he wasn't perfect (3:12). He was still striving to pattern his life after the life of Jesus Christ.

Paul also encouraged the Philippians to observe other mature Christians within the church. Timothy and Epaphroditus were part of the "us" mentioned in verse 17. The two men had proven Christlike character (2:19–30). God still uses believers who are carefully following Christ as patterns for our Christlike living.

ASK: What practical lessons might we learn from following the example of a godly believer? *How to relate to one's family, how to study the Bible, how to pray, how to serve in the church.*

B. Avoid selfish patterns (3:18, 19)

Paul warned the Philippians about unfit patterns, whom he tearfully described as enemies of the cross of Christ.

READ: Philippians 3:18, 19. **ASK:** How did Paul describe those who were unfit patterns? *They are focused on earthly things; they are opposed to Christ; they are selfishly motivated.*

If the people Paul pointed out professed to know Christ at all, their professions were false. They were unbelievers whose energy was devoted to destroying the gospel message.

Those who were bad patterns for life had hijacked Christianity to accomplish selfish goals and satisfy their greed. They were the antithesis of a Christlike life because they minded earthly things. They indulged their fleshly desires and boasted about behavior of which they should have been ashamed. They put the highest value on things that pass away—things that neither come from God nor have eternal worth. Their values were worldly rather than spiritual. But Paul assured the Philippian believers that these enemies would be destroyed. God would hold them responsible for their hedonistic actions.

ASK: Why might believers be tempted to follow the bad examples of these enemies of the cross? *Living for the moment is easier because it offers immediate gratification for our fleshly desires.*

III. Anticipate Citizenship in Heaven (Phil. 3:20—4:1)

A. Anticipate relocation (3:20)

The Philippians were Roman citizens because they lived in a Roman colony. Rome expected the Philippians to live as though they were in Rome—to dress like Romans, be governed by Roman magistrates, adhere to Roman justice, and even think like Romans. As citizens they enjoyed all the privileges and benefits of living in Rome even though their colony hundreds of miles away. So they understood what it meant to live as a citizen of a distant land.

READ: Philippians 3:20.

God considered the Philippians as citizens of Heaven. He wanted them to think and live with heavenly values. They represented God in the world.

ASK: What might the world notice about believers who eagerly await the return of Christ? *They aren't burdened by the anxieties of this world; they have joy and peace; they talk about Jesus a lot; they praise God often; they are busy doing God's work.*

The prospect of going home to be with their Savior should motivate us to live like a heavenly citizen on earth. We, like a Texan living in New York or a Canadian living in Florida, should be notably different to the world around us.

B. Anticipate transformation (3:21)

READ: Philippians 3:21. **ASK:** What weaknesses and deficiencies of our human bodies will you be glad to be rid of in Heaven?

At Christ's return, we will become residents of Heaven, and God will immediately transform our weak, mortal bodies into perfect, immortal bodies like His own. We will no longer be subject to aging, disease, injury, or death. We will have new resurrected bodies, tangible and real but free of sin and all its resulting defects.

How can God put back together a body that has been returned to the dust of the ground or burned by fire or dissolved in the sea? This miracle will be no problem for the Creator and Sustainer of the world. He is powerful to resurrect our bodies and demonstrate through them that even death is subject to Him!

When Christ appears, we will be like Him. Our goal of Christlikeness will finally be accomplished.

C. Anticipate with dedication (4:1)

READ: Philippians 4:1.

Paul called the Philippians his beloved and longed-for brothers and sisters in Christ, not to coerce them into following his instructions, but to communicate to them his passion behind his instructions. Paul's passion reflected Christ's passion for the Philippians. Christ has that same passion for us. He sacrificed greatly so we might live for Him.

ASK: Do you consider your fellow believers your longed-for brothers and sisters in Christ? Why?

ASK: How might a deeper understanding of Christ's passion for you help you grow in your passion for your fellow believers?

Paul thought ahead to the day when he would know joy as the Philippians stood before Christ in Heaven. They would be his crown of boasting, meaning he could speak highly of the Lord for transforming their lives. His words echo what he had already written in Philippians 2:16.

Paul had informed the Philippians that serving Christ wouldn't be easy because false religious leaders would oppose the Philippians' efforts. He turned the Philippians' focus to the future to motivate and encourage them. In the end, the enemies of the cross will succumb to divine judgment, but the Philippian believers will enjoy ultimate victory. Seeing Christ at the Rapture and becoming like Him will make every battle worthwhile. The Philippians were therefore to take an unwavering stand in the Lord.

Session Application

Steps

1. Challenge your learners to evaluate their goals.

ASK: What goals are you pressing toward? How do you know?

ASK: What should motivate you to press toward the goal of Christlikeness?

ASK: What changes do you need to make, if any, to make Christlikeness your pressing life goal?

2. Encourage your learners to help each other in their striving to become Christlike.

ASK: To whom might you look as a pattern of Christlikeness?

ASK: For whom might you become a pattern of Christlikeness?

3. Ask God to transform your learners' thinking so that Christlikeness becomes their primary life goal.