



FINISH STRONG • PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14 • 9/6/2020

MAIN POINT

In whatever season or stage of life we find ourselves, in Christ we can finish strong.

INTRODUCTION

As you begin, share challenges and/or celebrations from this past week and take a moment to pray and/or worship together.

Objectively speaking based on the choices you regularly make, what would someone say are your main priorities in life?

In Philippians 3:12-14, Paul turned to the language of the athletic contest to express his thoughts. Though he was continually pressing toward the goal of complete maturity in Christ, he did not feel that he had reached it. Paul spoke in the language of hope. These verses represent one of the most profound statements on the priority of the Christian life found anywhere in the New Testament.

UNDERSTANDING

| READ PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14.

Jesus calls us to be perfect as God is perfect, meaning that the standard we hold ourselves to is God's moral perfection and holiness. However, Scripture is adamant in reminding us that the perfection of God isn't something we gain on our own, nor is it something we will achieve in this life. As Christ followers, our focus in life can't be on our failures or our "good works" - giving either too much attention keeps us from growing in our faith and maturity as believers.

Paul now had a new goal toward which he was looking and running - the goal of becoming like Christ, which he described as spiritual maturity. Mature Christians humbly strive for more intimacy with Christ while at the same time relying on the Holy Spirit to help us live the Christian

life. Paul's goal of striving for Christlikeness has more to do with claiming God's promises in faith than with any effort by Paul to make himself holy.

What does it mean to be Christlike? What does that look like in everyday life (in the family, at work, around the neighborhood, etc.)?

How has God helped you to leave behind things from your past? What are some things that you may still need to leave behind - both "bad" things (sin, habits, etc.) and even "good" things (attempts to earn God's favor)?

Steve gave us the following 3 steps to finishing strong:

1. *Examine*: We must honestly examine ourselves to identify what might be keeping us from pursuing God and His call on our lives.
2. *Exert*: We must choose to work from our faith, striving to move forward towards Christlikeness.
3. *Expect*: We must have an expectation of the glorious future that is in store for us - perfect fellowship with God.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How do these verses encourage you the most?

What accomplishments and/or failures do you need to forget to focus on Jesus?

What Christian disciplines are helping you make progress toward spiritual maturity? How can we support and encourage each other as we forget our pasts and press on towards maturity in our faith?

PRAYER

Pray that God would help us let go of both past accomplishments and failures. Ask that He would reveal the plans He has for each of us to serve and honor Christ in our lives.

COMMENTARY

Paul's description of his desires pointed forward to a goal (v. 12). Not yet mature, he was still very much in the race of the Christian life. The perfection he would have at the future

resurrection was not yet attained. He still had to deal with what in Romans 7 he calls “the flesh,” an innate pull to sin. He had to deal with his sinful body and was only too aware of the need for further spiritual growth. He purposes to press on as he had not attained the intense personal knowledge of Christ that he desired and had not become all that Christ wanted him to be. Paul always held God up as the source of every part of the salvation experience.

Paul, in verse 13, underlines his denial of personal power or attainment and his single-minded focus. To describe that focus, he employs the image of a runner in a race who hopes to win the prize. He cannot look back. He cannot cloud his mind with past memories. He strains every muscle in his body to achieve forward motion. Eyes focus on the finish line. Paul forgets the guilt of persecuting the church. He forgets the pain of prison and physical punishment. He forgets the frustration of disobedient church members and false teachers. He looks ahead to see the resurrection, where he will meet Jesus face-to-face.

With this focus he pursues his goal intently (v. 14). His goal is to win the prize for which God had called him in Christ Jesus. He wants to hear God call his name and summon him to the victory stand, where he will meet Jesus face-to-face and know Him in perfect intimacy. Earthly prizes do not last. Eternal prizes do. The goal can never be realized on earth. It is a goal that pulls us heavenward. Note 1 Corinthians 9:25: “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” While Paul was not spiritually where he thought he would ultimately be, he intended not to be distracted by anything as he pursued his goal (Heb. 12:1-2). Both discipline and determination are required to accomplish this objective.