

### Philippians 3:12–16 (NKJV)

**12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.**

Let's take up from our last week's study in verse 13.

**13 but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,**

**Forgetting those things which are behind.** I had **not** noticed this last week as I studied. But **forgetting** is present tense. That emphasizes even more what Paul is talking about. What Paul is presently forgetting is the part of the race that he has already run. Paul is forgetting all the time. Every step he takes he is in the process of forgetting another step.

We don't have the capacity to focus on **everything**. So we need to pick. And Paul says that he is focusing **ahead**, not behind.

Now of course we need to understand this in context. It isn't like Paul has ongoing amnesia. Nor does he expect us to have it.

But Paul is essentially saying that the steps that are **most important** to me are not the ones I have **already** run. The most important ones are the ones between here and the finish line. In the sense of running the race the way it needs to be run, those are the only ones that matter.

How would you answer this question? If someone asked you this, how would you answer? How is your spiritual life? How is your spiritual life? What would you answer?

What are you engaged in **right now**? **Today**?

What is the step you are working **on right now**? What are you **struggling with**?

What are you **learning**? What is the last thing you learned in your time in the Word? What new thing are you thankful for? What new thing have you learned from a brother or sister? What is the last thing you provided to a fellow believer that they really needed? When is the last time you attempted to share the gospel with someone?

Do you see what I mean? That is the **current** race. Those are the signs that we are **actually running**. There is always something **new** about a person who is doing this **one thing**. It is reflected in how we **give praise** to God. We keep bringing out something **new** we have focused on about God's character. It is reflected in what we talk about with brothers and sisters. We might be excited about the newest thing we learned. Or we might have questions about it that we want to talk about.

It is sad when what we talk about in our spiritual walk is primarily **old**, when it is **past tense**, as if our Christian life was lived at some earlier time in our lives. And now we frequently reference the past instead of focusing on the steps that are ahead of us.

Do you see what I mean?

What is new about your life? What ground did you cover **yesterday**? What ground are you covering **today**? Are you as intense in your race to the finish line as you were earlier in your life? Are the stories about your successes **current**, or **past tense**? Are the lessons you most focus on **current** or **past tense**?

We talk often about God's mercies being new every morning. And we praise God from the bottom of our heart that they are. And we talk about the **solid doctrine** that we have heard in the past and we need to keep being **reminded of**. That is also true. It is vital that we remember many things we have learned in the past. And that is all good. But the point that Paul is making is that your striving has to be taking place on **this** day. The ground that you covered yesterday does not count for today. Paul's imagery does not allow it. That is the stuff he is continually, in present tense, **forgetting**. Past **success** or past **failure** does not determine the next step for today. The last step is now a memory that is no longer our focus. Our focus keeps readjusting to the next step. That is how runners run. We push on until we cross that finish line. That is the Christian life as Paul describes it.

Can you imagine watching the Olympics, and you are watching some sprinters. And one of them stops 5 steps out of the block and walks over to a reporter and says- Did you see that? Did you see me come out of the block. Man I hit that perfect. I have never done that well before. I can't wait for the reward I am going to get for that.

Or one is leading the race the whole time but as he comes into the final stretch he says, it isn't **fair** that I have to run **so much harder** than anyone else. Why should I have to do this when no one else is running this hard? I think I should be able to

just rest in running the race so hard up to this point. And he just stops running waiting to get some kind of reward.

We would laugh at that. And that means we understand. If you want to win the race, **the next step** is the most important one. And in one sense it is the **only one** that can be changed or improved. It is the **only one** we can focus on to finish the race well.

That is what Paul is talking about. Reaching forward. Moving forward. Pushing forward. Striving forward. This striving forward pictures a runner with his full attention set on the goal. He is straining every muscle. He is leaning his body full into it. And this too is **present tense**. Just as he is actively leaving his past steps **behind him**, he is exerting all of his present energy **ahead of him**.

**14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

What we see here is that Paul has a clear purpose.

Let's parse this out by looking at the parts first.

The words "**I press**" mostly tell us that Paul is making every effort to accomplish this thing. Again, if we expect our growth in Christ to be zapped on us, we have a different understanding of the Christian life than Paul does. Paul is a "**great effort**" kind of guy. And he encourages everyone else to do the same. We work because God works in us.

### **Toward the goal**

Here he is talking about the finish line. He is aware of its existence and its direction. And all the efforts in his life are ultimately aimed at this destination. It is another way of saying I am seeking first the kingdom of God. His efforts are all purposeful.

Every Christian shares the finish line. It is the **earthly finish** line and the **heavenly starting** line. It is the completion of our life here on earth. The goal is to run the race well. Paul talks elsewhere about winning the race. But that analogy falls apart a little bit because **every believer** wins the race. Every believer **wins** this universal prize.

### **for the prize of the upward call of God**

Odds are that this means the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. So the prize is salvation. The prize is the perfect fellowship we will have with our Savior and with all those who received that same call. And we receive the prize as a result of the call we received from Christ.

It is an **upward call**.

Jesus told us to set our affection heavenly, not earthly. We are called by Christ to do so by the **salvation call**. Faith keeps its focus on the **other** city, the **heavenly** city.

Consider this.

Imagine your day tomorrow one of doing this **perfectly**.

Imagine your day consisting of waking up with the **intention** and **desire** and **commitment** to press on with every minute you have in that day.

You have your eyes on **eternity** while living in space and time. You know that this day is **one more opportunity** to press on toward living for the glory of God as much as you possibly can. The **STEP** is **today**, or this **next minute**. The **GOAL** is the end of life.

So you wake up and you have a mix of things you are obligated to do and things you get to choose. So you think, how can I most **glorify** God, how can I best **represent** God, how can I most **grow in Christ** in the next thing I have to do? So you take your shower with that attitude. You brush your teeth with that attitude. You choose what to say to your spouse with that attitude. You choose what to say to your kids with that attitude. You drive to work with that attitude. You feed your kids with that attitude. You read and pray with that attitude. You approach your first task **at work** with that attitude. You speak to your **coworkers** with that attitude. You respond to your **boss** with that attitude. You feed your kids again with that attitude. You clean your house with that attitude. You process the thoughts that run through your mind with that attitude. You biblically counsel your mind as you process all the feelings and perceptions that happen to you throughout the day. You ask, is that true? Does this thought represent what God says? Does my understanding of my reality match how the Bible describes my reality?

As the day ends we understand we are **one day closer** to our **goal**. And the last **step** we ran was a good one. There will be periods when we recognize that we were a little off balance. Ah we may not have pushed as hard as we could have. Maybe we failed to run some of our thoughts or words through the grid of the Bible's instructions. Yeah, this step **could have been better**. But we go to bed thankful to be in this race. We are thankful the last step is behind us and we will wake up to a whole new one tomorrow. We might **think** about the last step. We might write down a blessing God gave us today so we can remember it when we meet dark times. We might think about a lesson we learned so we can make our next step better. But the fact that this step is over means my step today has little bearing on the **new challenge** that tomorrow will bring.

That is **pressing toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

That is a life well lived. Sure it does.

Does that look boring? Does that look easy? Does that always look like fun?

Does that look meaningless or unproductive? No. It does not.

The beauty of the race well run is that we are absorbed with meaningful and important activity every second we breath. We are never left with nothing to do. Even when we relax, we are pressing on to the goal.

Man this is easy **to say** but it is really hard **to do**. Our flesh keeps coaching us badly all day long. He says, look at that concession stand. Look at the people watching. Look at how everyone else is running. Look what happened yesterday. Look how lousy you ran. Do you really think you can do better today?

Flesh wants us to focus on how much I would rather do something different than the thing that is in front of me. We can lose perspective and when that happens there are a million offramps to the well run race. We all know that. If not, we would all be doing this perfectly. If it was easy, everyone would be doing it well.

But since we are not running perfectly, we only use our last step for information to improve our next step. We do not let it define how the race is going to end.

We will not allow it to discourage us from making better progress today.

**15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.**

So Paul is attaining to the resurrection of the dead. But he lets us know that is not a current event. It is future, at his death. Because of that he presses on in a day by day, step by step pursuit.

Since that is what Paul is doing, therefore, that is what the rest of the Philippians should be doing. Let **us**, he says. Let's do this together. You should be following my example.

Now who is he talking to at **Philippi**?

The **mature**. The word is actually the word for "perfect" but it is often used for those who are complete or mature. He is talking to those in Philippi who are the seasoned Christians. At least he is talking to those who **think** they are mature. It isn't hard to guess that there might be some that take a **different view** of things. Maybe there are some whose theologies have gotten twisted a bit. Maybe there are some who think they can **attain perfection** in this life. Maybe there are some that do not think **great effort** is required every day to live the Christian life.

Maybe there are some who regard themselves as leaders or wise Christians but

they add up the **spiritual walk** in a different way. Maybe they see spirituality as making a change in them so it does not matter what they do. We don't know. We too have those people among us in the Christian ranks in America.

It is very interesting what Paul says here.

They **SHOULD** all think like I think because **I am right**. That is what Paul is saying. They **should** have this mind where they are continually pressing forward to know Christ more and more. That is what they should be **thinking**. That is what they should be **doing**. That is what they should be **endorsing**. Paul has no difficulty saying that authoritatively. He does not back down. But look at his response if they **do not** agree with Paul.

**and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.**

Have you ever dealt with someone and you can see with absolute certainty that they are not seeing the reality of their life? You see the facts and you add them up and they do not fit with that person's view of their life? They are not viewing their life from a proper spiritual perspective, or even an accurate evaluation of truth. Or they have a view about how to live and it does not at all jibe with what scripture clearly says. I think of the example of our Charismatic brothers at this point, who tend to expect that God should zap into them what God commands them to do for themselves.

Yet we believe the person we are dealing with is a believer. We believe that they are fully trusting Christ for their salvation. We have little doubt that they know they are a sinner and that it is only Christ's death on the cross that has saved them from their sin and granted them eternal life.

What do you do when you encounter their misconceptions? What do you do with a person in your life that you have no doubt they are a believer but you know for a fact they cannot see the truth about parts of their lives? They cannot see how wrong they are about some of their views of God or their views of spirituality? What do we do?

I know what I did when I was younger. I would not back down. I would keep bringing it up. I would keep saying what I saw figuring that it was **my duty** to fix this issue. It was my duty to **straighten this person** out until they saw it like I did. Now keep in mind here that Paul **KNOWS he is right**. He has no doubt about it. This is a very very important text for us when we find ourselves in this spot. How does Paul approach it? Where is his trust?

Look at this. It is helpful.

**if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.**

Paul told them what the truth is. He proclaimed it clearly. He was confident they heard **this letter read** so they heard **the truth**. He was clear. He did not back down from initially **presenting** what is true and **challenging** what is true. Now had this been a Judiazer, Paul would have taken a different tact. Maybe if they were teachers, he may have dealt with it differently so their errors were not promoted in the church. But he appears to be dealing with just followers of Christ in the body. Remember these people are **believers** but they have a **wrong view** of something and they are **clearly wrong**. But they are **not wrong** about a core issue in their salvation.

Paul says, if any of you think different than the teaching I have presented to you and I know to be true, if you think different than what God's word has clearly revealed to me... Essentially, if you are thinking about this wrongly.

Paul might have said, kick them out of the church. Or straighten them out and badger them until they see the truth. Keep hammering this point at them. But Paul does not.

What Paul knows is that the Holy Spirit abides in every believer. So Paul's confidence is that this believer will come around. The Holy Spirit will accomplish this.

### **God will reveal even this to you**

Have you ever reached the point with a person where you knew that they simply could not see what you are seeing, even though you know you are right. Have you ever reached the point where you handed this over to God? Where you began to pray for the person to see this thing because talking was doing more harm than good. Have you ever done that?

Well guess what? So did Paul. Not every error is one that requires an immediate fix. Not every truth needs to be seen right now. God had confidence in the Holy Spirit that when this person **NEEDED** to see what **you** can see, **they would**. So my guess is that what Paul did for these people was **he prayed**. He prayed that they would know Christ more and more intimately. And He trusted in God's time they would see it.

I find it hard to discern when I should keep **bugging** a believer with what seems obvious, and when to **turn it over to God** in prayer. But it is very clear that there are times like that. I think, as a general rule, we must determine, have I told the person the truth I can see in love? If it is a believer in the church, is the thing they will not submit to a **core issue** or a **secondary issue**? If it is secondary, and I cannot make any headway, it is time to trust Christ and pray that God would reveal the truth.

Paul had great confidence in God's willingness and ability to reveal those things that were at first rejected by a believer. We should too.

**16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.**

This is interesting. Paul is saying that no matter what differences there may be, and no matter who cannot see what truth, do this.

**to the degree that we have already attained** In whatever stage you are in the race. At whatever your point of sanctification. What this means is that Paul expects there to be degrees of maturity in the Christian life. A new believer is the same as a seasoned believers in his **position** in Christ, but he is in a very different position in his **sanctification** in Christ. He has not run as much of the race as the seasoned believer.

So Paul is saying, no matter what degree you have reached, no matter how many days you have run the race or how faithfully you have run the race each day, do this.

**let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind**

I find this exceeding helpful when I apply this to those who see scripture through a Sovereign Grace lens and those who see it from an Armenian lens. Paul is essentially saying, let's not go to fisticuffs over our differences on this issue. We are both believers. Let's accept that and go on with the same rule and the same mind.

The **same rule** is probably all those things that both Christ and Paul have taught about how Christians **are to live their lives**. We are to seek first the Kingdom of God and love God with everything we have and are and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The same mind is very much the same thing. It is how we see the world, how we think about life. And we are to have the same way of looking at things as Christ did.

Paul was big on this phrase "the same mind".

**1 Corinthians 1:10 (NKJV)**

**10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.**

**Philippians 2:2 (NKJV)**

**2 fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.**

## Philippians 4:2 (NKJV)

**2 I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.**

This is clearly not a command to all think exactly the same things. But it is a command to have the **same mindset**. It is a mindset that sees everything from the higher perspective of Christ being the head of the church. And He set the example for everything that happens in the church. We are all in this together. We do not regard things from a perspective of how does this **advantage me**. It is how does this **glorify Christ**. We are to live with the same mindset that Christ had where He was willing to lay down His life to benefit us.

Now Christ is calling the Philippians, even the ones who might not have the greatest theology, even those who may not see themselves accurately, to live by **loving God** with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and to **love their neighbors** as themselves. They are to live in unity. They are not to allow their differences in opinion to divide them. They are not to allow their pride to create divisions between them. They are to all submit to Christ, no matter what their preferences or opinions or histories.

This is what we, **too**, are called to this morning.

Isn't it good to know that we do not all need to **think exactly the same**? Isn't it good to know that we might even be **wrong** about some fairly serious things and the Holy Spirit can be trusted to straighten us out in time if we are in Christ?

Isn't it good to know that each day we are taking one more step in a race that is actually **going somewhere**. Every decision matters. Each day matters. Each day is opportunity to run a little better.

That is what we wake up to.

This is what you and I are called to each day, together and separately. Back to our text as a conclusion.

**12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13**

**Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. 16 Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.**

Two easy applications for this week would be,

1. Will I wake up tomorrow and run this race very intentionally, making every effort to do every single thing I do for the glory of God?
2. If I have made a point clear to a fellow believer and it is not a core issue, will I trust God in prayer to make whatever change He thinks is necessary.