

Philippians

Lesson 6

Chapter 3:12-4:9

Leader Guide

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Lesson 6
Philippians 3:12-4:9
Pressing on Toward the Goal

“Our citizenship is in heaven” (Philippians 3:20)

Prayers

Introduction

How we view our life is fundamental to our priorities, how we live, and our faith. Paul reminds us that a life in Christ is focused on eternal priorities because heaven is our home, and this life is only an introduction to the life we were truly created. Our pastor gave an excellent illustration of our life with a tape measure. In the illustration, our life equaled one inch on the tape measure. If we lived 100 years, our birth, education, marriage, having kids, working, retiring, growing old, growing really old, and dying would all be compressed in that one inch. Compare that to the first 5000 years in heaven. Then your life would be four feet long on the tape measure, but the only time you knew any pain, suffering, or loss would be in the first inch. The other four feet on the tape measure would be a life surrounded by people we love and who love us, joy, and perfection. We were created to be in fellowship with Christ, now and forever. How will we view the importance of that first inch from eternity?

Read Philippians 3:12-4:1, Pressing on Toward the Goal

- Phil 3:12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me
- Phil 3:13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,
- Phil 3:14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.
- Phil 3:15 All of us 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.
- Phil 3:16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.
- Phil 3:17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.
- Phil 3:18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.
- Phil 3:19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.
- Phil 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,
- Phil 3:21 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.
- Phil 4:1 Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

1. In verse 3:12, Paul begins writing about being perfect – not that he already is. We have a lot of anxiety about living up to a perfect standard because we know we can't. Fortunately, that isn't exactly what Paul is teaching, so let's look closer. The word translated as perfect is τετελειώμαι (teteleiōmai) and has a sense of completion – as in finishing a race, or to complete, or to make perfect (Strong's Lexicon). The verse could be paraphrased; "Not that I have completed all that God has for me to do."

Jesus used the same root word when he said, "It is finished," regarding completing his sacrifice and giving up his life. He had fulfilled it all: all the law; all the requirements of righteousness; all for which the Father had sent him.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit (John 19:28-30).

What do you think of when you think of someone who is a perfectionist?

Being a perfectionist is usually not good because it is not attainable – unless it's your doctor or accountant! Being around someone who demands perfection of themselves and others can be very difficult because they are never satisfied or happy with their unattainable goals. Paul is not likely calling us to be something we cannot be.

2. Some of God's gifts for us are complete (perfected), some are ongoing, and some are in the future. Discuss whether the following are completed, ongoing, or in the future.
 - a. Salvation

Our salvation is complete, perfected in Christ. We can't be more or less saved. Sometimes our faith is tested, and sometimes, we are angry with God, but that does not change our salvation. God keeps us secure as his children in Christ.

- b. Sanctification

Our sanctification (holiness) is both complete and ongoing. Our sanctification through Christ is complete, but our daily sanctification through the Holy Spirit is ongoing.

- c. Forgiveness

Forgiveness of our sins is both complete and ongoing. Christ dies for all of our sins, past, present, and future, but we need to ask for forgiveness daily for the sins we commit and actions we fail to take.

- d. Your calling and purpose in Christ

Our calling and purpose are both complete and ongoing. Our primary calling is to be a redeemed child of God and is secured by Christ.

- e. Eternal life

Eternal life is our hope in the future and is assured in Christ.

3. The perfection that Paul is striving for in verse 3:12 is in the context of verses 3:8-11, where Paul discusses his past (verses 3:4-7), present (verses 3:8-9), and future hope (verses 3:10-11). Based on the context of these verses, what is Paul hoping to bring to completion (perfection)?

^{Phil 3:8} What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ^{Phil 3:9} and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

^{Phil 3:10} I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ^{Phil 3:11} and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

^{Phil 3:12} Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

^{Phil 3:13} Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,

^{Phil 3:14} I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Paul is in prison, facing death, and thinking about sharing Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection. Paul is also living with hope for his release and further work spreading the gospel. He hasn’t attained these things yet, so they have not yet been perfected.

4. In verses 13 and 14, Paul writes about pressing on to complete the goal of his calling in Christ. Paul is comparing his life to an Olympic runner competing for the prize. Pressing on is a two-fold process: we forget what is behind (failures, pains, triumphs, former glory and treasures) and move toward the goal ahead.
- a. What did Paul leave behind?

Paul is clear about what was left behind; his pedigree, his righteousness through observing the Law, and his standing in the Jewish Pharisee party. He also had to leave behind his guilt as a persecutor of the church and complicit in the murder of others.

- b. How was Paul’s “pressing on” to the goal different from salvation?

Salvation is not won or gained by pressing on; salvation is God’s gift of grace through Jesus Christ! Paul’s salvation was secure even if he died the moment after his conversion. God had more plans for Paul than just his salvation. Paul would bring the gospel to the world, which was the goal he pressed on toward – it is still the church’s goal.

- c. What challenges did Paul face in pressing on to his goal?

Paul endured shipwrecks, beatings, all manner of persecution, and prison. “Pressing on” meant persevering through great trials.

5. How is Paul’s goal in such stark contrast to a worldly view of the goal of life?

Paul's goal was focused on Christ and ministering to the people where the Spirit led him. The world's view of life is the accumulation of wealth, comfort, and security; "Whoever dies with the most toys wins." The reality of the world's view is, "Whoever dies with the most toys, dies."

6. The Greek word *teleioi* (perfect or complete) used in verse 3:12 appears again in verse 3:15. Compare the King James translation to the NIV translation. How do these translations convey Paul's meaning of "perfection" concerning the prize in verse 14?

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be **perfect**, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. (Philippians 3:14-15, King James Version)

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us 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. (Philippians 3:14-15, NIV and ESV)

Translations of verse 3:15 highlight the concept of perfection Paul was conveying – someone spiritually mature has been brought to "completion" or "perfection." In this case, a spiritually mature person is focused on the prize – living their life for Christ's purposes with the anticipation of the resurrection and enjoying eternal life with him.

7. After focusing on what is ahead, Paul returns to what the Philippians have already attained in verses 3:16-17. What are some of the things they have already attained?

We have already received so many blessings– redemption, salvation, a new life in the joy of fellowship with others, unity, and a life with purpose.

8. How would you describe your race toward the prize if Paul spoke directly to you?

Answers vary on how life can exalt Christ, honor God, and serve their neighbor.

9. Verse 3:20 was one of the favorites of Billy Graham, the evangelist, who paraphrased it by saying, "My home is in heaven; I'm just traveling through this world." How might our lives look if we embraced this truth?

Closing Prayer