

Slide 1

Are You Running The Race?

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14

Introduction

1. Tonight, I would like for each of you to perform a little self-evaluation with me.
2. Where are you at this moment in your spiritual life?
 - a. Full speed ahead.
 - b. Cruising at a comfortable pace.
 - c. Dead in the water.
 - d. Drifting with the current.
3. Tonight, I would like for us to examine Paul's own evaluation of himself.
4. If you aren't where God wants you to be, I hope to share with you some points from the pen of Paul to hopefully . . .
 - a. Help you pick up the pace if you have slowed down.
 - b. Get you moving if you are dead in the water or even drifting with the current.

Slide 2

I. Realize That We Aren't There Yet

A. "NOT THAT I HAVE ALREADY OBTAINED IT OR HAVE ALREADY BECOME PERFECT" (V. 12A)

1. When Paul says this, it is in order to emphasize that he is still running the race; He has not yet crossed the finish line.
2. In the two preceding verses, Paul said that the reason he wanted to "know Him [Christ] and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His

sufferings” even to the point of “being conformed to His death” was so that he might “attain to the resurrection from the dead” (vv. 10,11).

3. Here, in verse 12, he indicates that he has not “already obtained it” (v. 12a).
4. Paul also recognizes that he has not “already become perfect.”
5. He understood this to mean that he . . .

a. Had met the highest standard of goodness and virtue (Romans 12:2).

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2, NASB95)

b. Was mature, full grown as a child of God (1 Corinthians 14:20; Ephesians 4:13).

“Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.” (1 Corinthians 14:20, NASB95)

“until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13, NASB95)

c. Was fully developed in a moral sense (Colossians 4:12).

“Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.” (Colossians 4:12, NASB95)

6. Like Paul, you and I are not there yet. We are still running the race seeking to cross the finish line at the end of our lives or the end of the age, whichever may come first.

2a

B. “I DO NOT REGARD MYSELF AS HAVING LAID HOLD OF IT YET” (V. 13A)

1. No doubt, there were those in Philippi who thought themselves to have arrived at the peak of human achievement.
2. They were satisfied with themselves and their self-righteousness.
3. This was not the case with Paul:
 - a. He does not yet know Christ as he wants to know Him.
 - b. He is not to the point where his life conforms to the same standard of Christ's obedience which resulted in His death on the cross.
4. Stop and seriously consider this for a moment — are you to the point in your life where no sacrifice is too great when it comes to your obedience to God?
5. Can you pray, "Father, not my will, but yours be done?"
6. I believe that many of us, like the apostle Paul would have to admit, "I have not yet laid hold of that level of obedience just yet."
7. So what is it that Paul says we must do?

Slide 3

II. Consider Your Focus

A. CONCENTRATE ON "THE ONE THING" (13B)

1. If you are reading from the KJV, NKJV or the NASB95, you will notice that the words "I do" in the phrase "but one thing I do" are in italics.
2. This means these words are not found in the original text but are added by the translators so that you have a complete sentence.
3. When Paul says, "but one thing" he is pointing to . . .
 - a. The highest priority in his life"
 - b. That which captivates His full attention and demands his total concentration.
4. Too many of our lives are governed by . . .
 - a. The tyranny of the urgent.

- b. The persistent noise of popular voices around us.
 - c. The top news of the day.
5. Such things did not detract Paul from the overarching goal in his life.
 6. All of his thoughts, emotions and decisions were fixed on “one thing.”

3a

B. FORGET WHAT LIES BEHIND (v. 13C)

1. In the rest of this verse, Paul paints a picture for us of his pursuit of this “one thing.”
2. First, he writes, “forgetting what lies behind” (v. 13b).
3. It is the picture of a runner who refuses to look back over his shoulder.
4. Paul does not tell what these things are which he forgets, but they may include . . .
 - a. His days as a zealous persecutor of the church (vv. 5-6).
 - b. Everything which he has already achieved and attained in his walk with Christ.
5. At this point in his life Paul has known Christ and probably served for at least twenty years.
6. He could easily have pointed back to his long list of achievements and to special revelations given to him by the Lord.
7. However, he purposely chooses to forget those things and not bring them up.

3b

C. REACH FORWARD TO WHAT LIES AHEAD (v. 13C)

1. Coming back to the portrayal of the runner,
 - a. not only does Paul refuse to look back over his shoulder,
 - b. he keeps straining with every fiber of his being toward the goal.
2. Imagine in your minds eye, Paul is running a race:
 - a. His body is bent forward

- b. His hand is stretched out reaching toward the goal
- c. His eye is focused upon it.
- 3. His every thought and emotion involves his eager anticipation of arriving at the goal.
- 4. There were those who had chosen to drop out of the race and simply “enjoy life” having “set their minds on earthly things” (v. 19).
- 5. Not Paul, for him faith was not simply a decision from the past, it was a race being run to this very moment, constantly straining toward what lay ahead.
- 6. Does that describe you?
- 7. I know that every day I find myself asking God to help me pursue the goal with such a passion.
- 8. If often feel that I fall short, but I am determined not to drop out of the race.

Slide 4

III. Keep Pressing Onward and Upward

A. “I PRESS ON SO THAT I MAY LAY HOLD OF THAT FOR WHICH I ALSO WAS LAID HOLD OF BY CHRIST JESUS (V. 12B).

- 1. Even though Paul knew he was an imperfect man, he refused to quit.
- 2. He was determined to “press on,” to move rapidly and decisively toward his objective.
- 3. Paul had been “taken hold of by Christ Jesus” and Christ was not about to let him go.
- 4. Because of this, Paul had “all the reason, the endurance, the assurance, and the joy”¹ he needed to pursue Christ.
- 5. In his letter to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul wrote of God’s pursuit of us

¹ Hansen, G. Walter. *The Letter to the Philippians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.

through Christ (Ephesians 2:4-7).

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:4–7, NASB95)

6. God has pursued each of us with the same love, grace and kindness.
7. Are we running after Him?

4a

B. “I PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL FOR THE PRIZE OF THE UPWARD CALL OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS” (v. 14).

1. As Paul continues this imagery of the race, he writes, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (v. 14).
2. Notice that Paul does not say . . .
 - a. “I ran the race and I reached the goal.”
 - b. “I ran the race, I burned out, so I gave up.”
3. Instead he says, “I am still running the race toward the goal.”
4. Running the race of faith in Christ demands that we concentrate on the finish line:
 - a. Whether that finish line is being with Christ at death — “having the desire to depart and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23).
 - b. Or, the return of Christ from heaven — “from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior” (Philippians 3:20).
5. At the finish line there is a prize which awaits us:
 - a. Paul called it “the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8).

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- b. Peter called it “the unfading crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4).
- c. Our glorified Lord called it “the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

Conclusion

1. Tonight, through the good news of a Savior whom we know as Jesus Christ, God is calling you heavenward.
2. He wants you to know what it is like to live and grow in Christ Jesus.
3. He calls you to let go of this world’s allurements and take up the race which He sets before you.
4. If you will run the race and not quit, but focus your eyes on Jesus, there is a great reward which awaits you.
5. Will you come to Jesus tonight?