

# LESSON SIX

## PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL

### Philippians 3:12-21

As we continue in chapter three of Philippians, Paul instructs the church to “press towards the goal” in the same way an athlete would run a race. He instructs them, using himself as the example. He is aware and on guard of the things that would trip him up and distract him and he keeps those things in his peripheral vision, while his main focus and attention are set on the finish line.

1. There is a truth in the statement that “the flesh doesn’t get better with age.” In fact, the longer I spend in this flesh the more aware I am of this truth. Perfection is something this flesh will never experience until Christ returns and our “mortality puts on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53-54). That’s what Paul seems to be saying as we pick up our lesson in verse 12. He knows he has not yet been made perfect, his spiritual maturity is not complete, conforming to the image of Christ has not reached its final goal. However, though he knows this, what is his mind set on? (See verse 12b).

a. Do you have any thoughts concerning what it means to “follow after” (KJV) or to “press on, in order to lay hold of” (NIV, NASB)?

b. What is it that Christ has “apprehended us” for? See John 6:38-40, 15:16, 17:18-19, 1 Thessalonians 4:3a and Hebrews 10:9-10. Share how these verses speak to you.

c. How does 1 Timothy 6:11-16 further minister to you and shed more light on Philippians 3:12? Share your thoughts.

2. What does Paul say is the “one thing” he does in verse 13 of Philippians chapter 3?

a. There are two aspects of “looking back” that are destructive and dangerous. The first occurs when we turn our attention on our successes, our past achievements and “good works”. So often we hear people talk of all the wonderful ministries, etc. they were once involved in. They look back on specific times the Lord spoke to them and the awesome ways they once saw Him work in their lives, but they never talk about what God is doing in their lives *now*. Living in the memories of yesterday, they have become spiritually lazy, stagnant and unmotivated *today*. Have you ever experienced this kind of stagnation? If so, can you share your experience?

b. The other dangerous aspect of “looking back” occurs when we focus on our failures. This is perhaps more common and most of us have experienced this trap. Some of us have a constant battle with it. Focusing on our failures completely immobilizes us, throwing us into a deep, self-centered discouragement and depression that is difficult for us to climb up out of. Have you, or are you, experiencing fruitlessness because you can’t get your eyes off of your failures?

3. What does Paul tell us is the remedy for both of these setbacks in our “race”? As you read verse 13 and 14 together, what is the “spiritual secret” Paul shares with us?

a. What is the “high” or “upward” calling of God in Christ Jesus? Share in your own words, using Scripture to support your answer. You may use a verse we’ve already looked at or another that the Lord lays on your heart.

4. I like the way the Amplified bible translates verse 15. It says, “So let those of us who are spiritually mature and full-grown have this mind and hold these convictions; and if in any respect you have a different attitude of mind, God will make that clear to you also.” What convictions? The ones discussed in verses 12-14. State again what these convictions are.

a. There is a promise hidden here in verse 15. Read it over again carefully. Have you found yourself (or others) in a “different attitude of mind” than the attitude Paul has shared with us? What is God’s promise to those who are His?

b. Do you think some of our discussions in question 2 are tools that God uses to bring us to this attitude of mind? What kind of things has He used, or is He using in your life to keep you focused on God’s “upward call?”

5. We see another important “spiritual secret” in verse 16. Paul says **“let us live up to what we have already attained”** (NIV). The Amplified translates it, **“...let us hold true to what we have already attained and walk and order our lives by that.”** In other words, we must not forget what we have already learned! There is no “higher truth” outside of our salvation. The cup of redemption we have been given cannot be replaced by anything greater. We can drink deeper from it, but we cannot “finish” it and go on to “other things.” With this in mind, try in a few sentences to share the **most important things** you have “already attained,” or learned so far in your personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

6. What is Paul’s admonishment to the Philippians in verse 17?

a. Do you have “examples” God has placed in your life who have helped you in a practical way to pattern your life after Christ? Take a moment to stop and thank God for those people and pray for their continued faithfulness in the race to the finish line. If you have something you can share here about how someone has blessed and affected your life, please do.

7. In verses 18 and 19 we can feel the grief that Paul expresses. Over what does he weep?

a. How does he describe these people?

b. What is the “bottom-line” description we read in verse 19b?

c. How would you describe “earthly things?” What kind of things would you include in that list?

d. Do you find yourself spending too much mental energy on these things? What is the remedy you would recommend to someone who came to you for advice on how to change their mind-set?

8. As we come to verse 20, think for a moment of the differences between a **tourist** and a **citizen** of a country. What is usually the main focus of a tourist? What would be their objectives as they visit places outside of their community or homeland?

a. What would you consider to be the responsibilities of a tourist visiting a foreign land?

9. What about the citizen of that land? What kind of goals and objectives do they have, and how do they differ from that of a tourist?

a. What are their responsibilities to their country and their community?

b. How are they different from that of the tourist?

10. Where is our true citizenship?

a. Why, then is it so important that we not get entangled in “earthly things?”

b. Does this mean we are not to enjoy or find pleasure in any of the wonderful things this life has to offer? Does it mean we have no responsibilities? Expound on this and share your thoughts.

c. After looking at this earth as a “foreign country” and heaven as our “true home,” share what this means to you and what the Lord has spoken to your heart.

11. How difficult it often is to keep that balance and that right mind-set while we “travel” through this earth on our way “home.” The failures and weaknesses of this flesh so often overcome and discourage us. What does Paul tell us in verse 21 that we have to look forward to? What will He change/transform?

a. How will He do this? Why can we have complete assurance and confidence in His promises? (Look back to Philippians 1:6, Numbers 23:19 and 2 Corinthians 1:20)

12. How has this lesson ministered to you? What is the most meaningful truth the Lord has planted in your heart?