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Philippians – The Blueprint for Joy #11

Welcome to OIC. We are glad you are here. We are continuing our study of the letter that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. Have you read someone else's mail? God gives us that privilege because this letter was written to the church at Philippi but intended for all of us. Paul started the church and even though he is in jail he continues to display a pastoral heart for the church. If you notice we are not doing a message on verses 4 through 11 so let me capsulize those for you. Basically Paul said this: when I see the value of Christ and when I saw that salvation was only in Christ, I took everything that once was gain and counted it as loss and I abandoned it all for Christ.

Today we are going to look at a great portion of Scripture. Philippians 3:12-16 which will be our support text.

Philippians 3:12-16

¹² Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

¹⁶ however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

The basic thought of our passage is the call to pursue the prize. Today, let me give you 3 elements that are necessary when pursuing the prize of perfection.

Element #1 Don't think we are there yet!

Verse 12 launches this thought.

Philippians 3:12

¹² Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Basically Paul says if we take a close look at ourselves we will all see that we are not as we should be. We are not all that we can be and we are not all that we will be when we eventually meet Jesus. Spiritual growth starts with a recognition that none of us are what we ought to be spiritually. The right attitude seems to be "I'm not there yet but I'm working on it." Let me show you in First Corinthians a verse that supports that thought.

I Corinthians 13: 12

¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.

This is just another reminder from Scripture that we are not quite there yet. Staying in verse 12 of our text

Philippians 3:12

¹² Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus

The words I press on, ("DIOKO"), in Greek, means aggressive, energetic endeavor. In other words, Paul says I am running after the prize with all my might. Many of you may not understand that Paul writes these verses approximately 30 years after his conversion. Hebrews 12:1, 2 says it well.

Hebrews 12:1,2

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us

2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We must lay aside everything that will slow us down. So, what is necessary in pursuing the prize? Element #1 is recognizing we're not there yet and being aware that my spiritual condition needs improvement. And that I need to maximize my effort to achieve the prize.

Element #2 Forget the past

Philippians 3:13

13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,

Paul uses a term of affection for the Philippians. He calls them "brethren". He wants to move the hearts of the readers of this letter. He includes a disclaimer. "I have not taken hold of it yet". Focused concentration is the result of a negative and a positive. The negative being he "forgets what lies behind" and the positive being "I reach out for what lies ahead". Don't let past sins debilitate you. Sad to say, so many carry guilt from past sins when Jesus took your guilt and shame at the cross. Within this race, in pursuit of the prize, as Christians we are never disqualified. Let me prove it to you.

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.

When I forget the past, I find new motivation to pursue the prize. God has forgiven my sins. He counts them as nothing so why let them drag me down or hold me in a stationary position? Here's another verse that helps me.

Psalms 17:15

As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake.

We have to live in light of being called out of this world. I am motivated to know that I will one day awake with his likeness. I am waiting for perfection which God will give me the day I get to heaven. So let me recap what it takes to pursue the prize. **#1**, recognize we are not there yet, **#2**, forget the past.

Element #3 Press on toward the goal

Philippians 3:14-16

14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **15** Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you;

16 however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

As I stated earlier, the main focus or thought of this passage, or if you will, the whole heart of this passage is the pursuit of the prize. And in verse 14 Paul admits he is pressing on toward the goal and so should we.

I remember as a young associate pastor I would go on home visits with my senior pastor as he mentored me. We would drive up to a home of one of our parishioners and park in the driveway and he would say 'open your car door, Brian, don't get out and slam it closed. And then I watched as he did the same. I asked him why are we doing this? His response to me was this family's probably not pursuing the prize right now

so we waited and someone would pull back the curtain and look out and see us and then we would wait about 5 minutes before entering their home. It gave them time to clear the cigarette smoke and kick the beer bottles under the couch. I'm not sure how effective all this was but it certainly was an interesting visitation experience. I never attempt this style of visiting. I always let you know I'm coming.

What should motivate you and what should motivate me? The upward call, of course. We have to live in light of being called out of this world. I am motivated to know that I will one day awake with his likeness. Verse 15 often gets overlooked. I think Paul is using sarcasm here. He knows not one perfect person exists so he says this to those who are walking around thinking they are perfect. He clarifies it when he says "if any of you have a different attitude – do you think it might be remotely possible that none of us are perfect yet?" Think this way – set your mind on this – pursuing the prize. You see there will be times when we just don't feel like pursuing the prize. At that moment, God will move us along via prompting from the Holy Spirit or perhaps bring someone into your life or an event that will suddenly give you a spiritual awareness. Now let's take a look at verse 16.

Philippians 3:16

¹⁶ however, let us keep living by that same *standard* to which we have attained.

Here are some important reasons why we pursue the prize. I'll give you 3 of them very quickly. **#1** – it glorifies God. When we are following the instructions God gives us, others see that and this alone will glorify God. **#2** - it verifies our regeneration. If we are truly a new creation, the pursuits of our life must absolutely be changed. We have to do a 180 degree turn in the pursuit of Christlikeness. **#3** – it keeps you on the straight and narrow path. It will definitely keep you out of trouble.

The most frustrating thing a pastor sees in his congregation is inconsistency. I've told you before. I want you to remember this. Never live beneath your theology. Pastors see people with great potential and suddenly they have slipped back into the mud of the world. Here are 4 things to help with that consistency.

The **first thing** I do is be consistent in my Bible study. God's Word is the only system of absolutes I ever use. The **second thing** I do is be consistent in my prayer life. As I converse with God I get further direction for my life. The **third thing** I do, I recognize as I move through the trials of my life, God is with me and I can approach the trials of life with a consistent state of mind, knowing that God is with me and that He will strengthen and establish me. The **fourth thing** I do, I try to find earthly examples of good Christians. I know that Jesus is the ultimate example but I know that God places strong Christians in my life for a reason.

Conclusion

Ask yourself this question. Are you pursuing the prize? Are you growing? Or are you standing in one spot looking backward, spending your time defending yourself or are you willing to say I'm not where I ought to be but I'm trying to move towards the goal. This is a serious portion of the Bible – a real wake up call for some. If you find yourself stuck in the mud, pray about it and ask God to refresh your commitment to pursue the prize. If sin is slowing you down, confess that sin to God and He will cleanse you from all that unrighteousness and allow you to move along to the pursuit of the prize.