

The Heights Baptist Church

IN PURSUIT OF CHRIST • IN PURSUIT OF CHRIST • PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16 • 10/17/2021

MAIN POINT

We are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the image of Christ in an ongoing, never-ending process.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

If you had to pick one thing, what would you say is your priority in life? How do your choices reinforce that priority?

What are the priorities of people living in our culture today?

How do our culture's priorities compare with the church's?

In Philippians 3:12-16, Paul turned to the language of the athletic contest to express his thoughts. Though he was continually pressing toward the goal of complete maturity in Christ, he did not feel that he had reached it. Paul spoke in the language of hope. These verses represent one of the most profound statements on the priority of the Christian life found anywhere in the New Testament.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14.

What do you think spiritual perfection looks like? How do you relate Paul's encouragement in this verse with Jesus' command in Matthew 5:48: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Jesus calls us to be perfect as God as perfect, meaning that the standard we hold ourselves to is God's moral perfection and holiness. However, Scripture is adamant in reminding us that the perfection of God isn't something we gain on our own, nor is it something we will achieve in this life.

What are some examples of things Christians today need to leave behind from their past (v. 13)? How has God helped you leave behind things in your past?

Using the imagery of a track race, where does Paul picture himself in his spiritual life? What prize is he after? Look back at Philippians 3:10 to help you answer.

Paul now had a new goal toward which he was looking and running—the goal of becoming like Christ, which Paul described as spiritual maturity. Mature Christians humbly strive for more intimacy with Christ while at the same time relying on the Holy Spirit to help us live the Christian life. As we've seen in our study, the greater context in Philippians 3 addresses works righteousness—Paul's argument that we earn God's grace and favor by what Christ has done for us, not by anything we do. Thus, Paul's goal of striving for Christlikeness has more to do with claiming God's promises in faith than with any effort by Paul to make himself holy. Because of this truth, Paul's challenge to forget what lies behind also applies to the "good works" we do to try to earn favor from God.

Why must those things be left behind, regardless of how "good" they are?

What does it mean to be Christlike (v. 14)? What does that look like in everyday life in the family, at work, or around the neighborhood?

Read 1 John 3:2-3. How do these verses encourage you in your pursuit of Christ?

| HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ PHILIPPIANS 3:15-16.

Paul concluded that the spiritually mature among the Philippian believers should agree with him and consider themselves to be in the process of growing toward Christlikeness. In effect, he insisted that mature believers would be aware of their incomplete maturity. Paul was confident that if some Christians disagreed with him and thought they had arrived at perfection, God would convince them of his viewpoint's validity.

What is God's role in transforming us into the image of Christ? What is our role?

Why is it important for us as Christians to put into practice the truths we learn about God and about the Christian life? Share an example from your life.

What differences have you noticed in your life between times when you aren't applying God's truth to your life and times when your faith is active?

What experiences and disciplines help Christians mature (v. 15)? What obstacles prevent believers from growing in maturity?

As Christ followers, our focus in life can't be on our failures or our "good works." Giving either too much attention keeps us from growing in our faith and maturity as believers. Neither Paul's past perceived success in his zealous Judaism nor his past failure in persecuting the church kept him from fully embracing and serving God after he came to faith in Christ (see 3:4-7). Just as God had a plan for Paul's life, he has a plan for each of us, too.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How do these verses encourage you the most?

What accomplishments and/or failures do you need to forget to focus on Jesus? How can doing so help you better serve Him?

How can we support and encourage each other as we forget our pasts and press on toward maturity in our faith?

**What Christian disciplines are helping you make progress toward spiritual maturity?
What evidence indicates that you are making progress in your struggle toward maturity?**

PRAYER

Pray that God would help us let go of both past accomplishments and failures. Ask that He would reveal the plans He has for each of us to serve and honor Christ in our lives.

COMMENTARY

Paul's description of his desires pointed forward to a goal (v. 12). Not yet mature, he was still very much in the race of the Christian life. The perfection he would have at the future resurrection was not yet attained. He still had to deal with what in Romans 7 he calls "the flesh," an innate pull to sin. He had to deal with his sinful body and was only too aware of the need for further spiritual growth. He purposes to press on as he had not attained the intense personal knowledge of Christ that he desired and had not become all that Christ wanted him to be. Paul always held God up as the source of every part of the salvation experience.

Paul, in verse 13, underlines his denial of personal power or attainment and his single-minded focus. To describe that focus, he employs the image of a runner in a race who hopes to win the prize. He cannot look back. He cannot cloud his mind with past memories. He strains every muscle in his body to achieve forward motion. Eyes focus on the finish line. Paul forgets the

guilt of persecuting the church. He forgets the pain of prison and physical punishment. He forgets the frustration of disobedient church members and false teachers. He looks ahead to see the resurrection, where he will meet Jesus face-to-face.

With this focus he pursues his goal intently (v. 14). His goal is to win the prize for which God had called him in Christ Jesus. He wants to hear God call his name and summon him to the victory stand, where he will meet Jesus face-to-face and know Him in perfect intimacy. Earthly prizes do not last. Eternal prizes do. The goal can never be realized on earth. It is a goal that pulls us heavenward. Note 1 Corinthians 9:25: "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever." While Paul was not spiritually where he thought he would ultimately be, he intended not to be distracted by anything as he pursued his goal (Heb. 12:1-2). Both discipline and determination are required to accomplish this objective.

Paul believed that all spiritually mature Christians would agree with or would share his philosophy toward life (v. 15). "Mature" translates the same Greek term as did "perfect" in verse 12. Paul pointed to a difference of opinion as to the meaning of perfection. His opponents thought they had obeyed the law and achieved perfection in this life. Paul knew he would never obtain perfection. The only persons who could claim to be part of the "perfect ones" were those who knew that running the race and seeking the goal was the only mark of perfection possible on earth. If they thought differently, Paul was confident God could cause them to change their minds, since Paul's human arguments could not. Paul was content to shed some light on the subject.

As followers of Christ, we are responsible to live out or put into practice what we have learned (v. 16). We are not perfect, but that is no excuse not to run the race and seek the prize. God is calling us to the victory stand. We must run as hard as we can to cross the finish line.