

# Becoming Like Christ

## Lesson 13: Pressing On Toward the Goal -- Philippians 3:7-14

Picture a runner in the last quarter of a long race. Her lungs are burning and her legs have gone past the point of feeling, and everything in her wants to glance back to see how far she has come and how the others are doing. But she does not look back. She has learned that the backward glance steals strength from the forward stride. So she fixes her eyes on the tape stretched across the finish, leans into it, and runs. Everything that is behind her, the early miles, the stumble at the water station, even the personal best she set last spring, has shrunk to a single point of unimportance compared to the one thing in front of her.

That is the picture Paul gives us in the final verses of Philippians 3, and it is a fitting place for our whole study to end. We began thirteen lessons ago by standing in a doorway, looking at a verse that promised we are being changed into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18). We have walked through the rooms of that house since then, the love and the humility and the endurance that look like Jesus. Now Paul, near the end of his own race, shows us the engine that drives the whole thing and the heart that keeps a Christian moving when the running gets hard.

What is striking is who is speaking. This is not a beginner full of easy enthusiasm. This is a man who had every religious advantage, circumcised on the eighth day, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee blameless under the law (Philippians 3:5-6). And he takes that whole impressive resume, the things he once counted as gain, and writes one word across all of it: loss. Not because those things were evil, but because he had found something of surpassing worth. He had come to know Christ Jesus his Lord, and next to that everything else looked like refuse.

Read these eight verses slowly, because they hold the secret of a Christian who keeps on. Paul knows Christ and yet says he does not yet know Him as he longs to. He has been laid hold of by Christ and yet says he has not yet laid hold. He is sure of the prize and yet refuses to coast toward it. Here is the holy tension at the center of the Christian life, already grasped by grace, not yet finished, and so pressing on with everything in him toward the goal. As we close this study, let this be the verse that follows you home: forgetting what lies behind, straining forward to what lies ahead, press on.

**Group Discussion:** Paul takes the most impressive achievements of his life, the credentials he had spent years building, and calls them loss for the sake of knowing Christ. In a world that measures people by their accomplishments, status, and reputation, what would it actually look like for a Christian today to count those things as loss compared to knowing Jesus? What makes such a reckoning so hard for us?

**Personal Reflection:** Paul says he has not yet arrived, that he presses on toward what still lies ahead. Where in your own walk are you tempted either to think you have arrived and

can coast, or to give up because you feel you will never arrive? As this study ends, what is the one thing you most want to keep pressing toward in your life with Christ?

*Read Philippians 3:7–14*

## **Study Questions**

1. Paul says that whatever gain he once had, he now counts as loss for the sake of Christ, and that he counts everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord (Philippians 3:7–8). What does it tell us about the true worth of Christ that a man would write off every other advantage to gain Him? Why does Paul speak not merely of knowing about Christ but of knowing Him personally as Lord?
2. Paul names the specific things he had counted as gain: his heritage, his religious zeal, his blameless record under the law (Philippians 3:5–6). What are the things in your own life that you are most tempted to count as gain, the achievements, relationships, or securities you quietly lean on? Which of them is hardest to lay down before Christ?
3. Paul says he wants to be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of his own that comes from the law, but the righteousness that comes from God and depends on faith (Philippians 3:9). What is the difference between trying to build a righteousness of our own and receiving the righteousness God gives through faith? Why is this distinction so important to the gospel?
4. Paul's deepest desire is to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death (Philippians 3:10). Where in your life right now are you being invited to share in Christ's sufferings, perhaps through hardship, sacrifice, or dying to your own will? How might that very place become a place of knowing Him more deeply?

5. Paul writes that he presses on so that he may attain the resurrection from the dead (Philippians 3:11), and he describes the whole Christian life as movement toward a future hope. How does keeping the resurrection in view shape the way a Christian lives now? Why is our hope anchored in the bodily resurrection rather than merely in going to be with the Lord?
6. Paul speaks of forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead (Philippians 3:13). What is behind you that you most need to forget, whether past sins that still accuse you or past successes that tempt you to coast? What would it look like this week to stop looking back and to strain forward instead?
7. Paul says that he has been laid hold of by Christ Jesus, and that this is why he presses on to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of him (Philippians 3:12). How does it change the nature of our striving to know that Christ first took hold of us? Why does being grasped by Christ produce effort rather than passivity?
8. Paul presses on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). What is the prize that keeps you running, and how clearly do you actually see it? When the Christian life gets hard, what helps you fix your eyes on the goal rather than on the difficulty of the road?
9. Paul says plainly, not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on (Philippians 3:12). On one side this corrects those who imagine they have already arrived and can coast, presuming their salvation is secured no matter how they live. On the other side it corrects those who imagine that a true Christian becomes sinlessly perfect in this life. How does Paul's settled confidence in Christ's righteousness, joined to his refusal to consider himself as having already laid hold of the prize, teach us to hold assurance and perseverance together rather than letting go of either?

10. Look back not only across Philippians 3:7–14 but across this whole study of becoming like Christ, from being changed into His image, through the love and humility and endurance we have considered, to this closing call to press on. Name one specific way you sense Jesus has been forming you into His image through these thirteen lessons, and one concrete step you will take to keep pressing on toward the goal rather than treating the end of this study as the end of the race.

### **Now or Later**

**Reflect on these passages:** 1 Corinthians 9:24–27, run the race to win the imperishable prize and discipline the body; Hebrews 12:1–2, lay aside every weight and run with endurance, looking to Jesus; 2 Timothy 4:6–8, Paul near the end says he has fought the good fight and finished the race; 2 Peter 1:5–11, make every effort to add to your faith so that you never fall; Galatians 5:4, those who seek to be justified by law have fallen from grace.