

Gospel Focus

Philippians 3:12-4:1

Training: Olympics, marathon, etc.

- All this just didn't happen a few weeks before. Training, dedication, sacrifice.
- It's what they lived their lives for and around.
- Their pursuit showed what they valued.

End Goal: Finish line, goal, target (don't close your eyes and aim).

- It doesn't matter how accurate you are if you are aiming at the wrong goal.
- The question isn't just "if you'll be successful" but "will you be successful at what really matter."
- We saw in Philippians 3:1-11 that Paul valued knowing Christ above all, being found in him. He valued what was most valuable. But it isn't just a head knowledge, it changes the way he lives his life (e.g., time, values, priorities, decisions, attitude, etc.).
- As one pastor says, "It's not how high you jump when the Spirit hits you, but how obedient you walk when your feet hit the ground."

Paul passionately pursued his calling in Christ and continued to keep his focus on his eternal aim of heaven.

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining 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 those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. ^{4:1} Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.¹

1. A Race to Be Finished (vv. 12-16)

¹² Οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι, διώκω δὲ εἰ καὶ καταλάβω, ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ κατελήμφθην ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ]. ¹³ ἀδελφοί, ἐγὼ ἑμαυτὸν οὐ λογίζομαι κατειληφέναι· ἐν δὲ, τὰ μὲν ὀπίσω ἐπιλανθανόμενος τοῖς δὲ ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενος, ¹⁴ κατὰ σκοπὸν διώκω εἰς τὸ βραβεῖον τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. ¹⁵ Ὅσοι οὖν τέλειοι, τοῦτο φρονῶμεν· καὶ εἴ τι ἐτέρως φρονεῖτε, καὶ τοῦτο ὁ θεὸς ὑμῖν ἀποκαλύψει. ¹⁶ πλὴν εἰς ὃ ἐφθάσαμεν, τῷ αὐτῷ στοιχεῖν. ¹⁷ Συμμιμηταί μου γίνεσθε, ἀδελφοί, καὶ σκοπεῖτε τοὺς οὕτω περιπατοῦντας καθὼς ἔχετε τύπον ἡμᾶς. ¹⁸ πολλοὶ γὰρ περιπατοῦσιν οὓς πολλάκις ἔλεγον ὑμῖν, νῦν δὲ καὶ κλαίων λέγω, τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ¹⁹ ὧν τὸ τέλος ἀπώλεια, ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία καὶ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ αὐτῶν, οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες. ²⁰ ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει, ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτήρα ἀπεκδεχόμεθα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, ²¹ ὃς μετασχηματίζει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξαι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα. ^{4:1} Ὡστε, ἀδελφοί μου ἀγαπητοὶ καὶ ἐπιπόθητοι, χαρὰ καὶ στέφανός μου, οὕτως στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ, ἀγαπητοί.

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining 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 those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Not There Yet: Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect. In Christ, we are made righteous and our calling and salvation are secure, but we have not reached glory yet (i.e., heaven, sanctification).

- We have not obtained our full knowledge of salvation (righteousness is imputed). But our comprehension has not fully developed because we are not standing in heaven, sanctified (e.g., v. 11, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead; also “if, perhaps, I might”).
- The starting point of growth in Christ is recognizing that you haven’t arrived, you haven’t made it. There is still a lot of work to do.
 - Do you see an area of your life, a sin? GOOD, that means you have eyes to see areas where God is calling you to grow.
 - True vs false self. Too often we fail to bring our broken selves to God and the community of saints when that is the part of us that needs God’s transformation and others’ help the most.
 - **Failure to admit your weakness and acknowledge your sin robs you of God’s grace in the parts of your life that you need it the most.**

Paul is calling us to own our faith because Christ has made [us] his own. **The goal of the Christian life is to become, by God’s grace, what we already are in Christ.**

- We are called to shine the light of the gospel into every area of our lives (e.g., junk drawer of our heart, under the dresser of our thoughts, etc.)
 -

The Power of Our Progress: But I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

- Our pursuit of holiness is motivated and empowered by his purchase of us (because Christ Jesus has made me his own). It is in **response** to our salvation, not an attempt to earn it.
- Our pursuit of Christ is based on our righteousness in Christ, not any form of self-righteousness: “And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (3:9).
- In Ephesians (3:17-19) Paul says that God gives us strength so we can understand the fullness of his love. **His grace allows us to grow in the gospel.**

We must continue to pursue Christ because there is so much of Christ to know! He is infinite, we are finite (e.g., gospel as ocean, beach).

- Your salvation does not stop your growth in God, but launches it. It launches us into a lifetime of deeper love, service, and obedience. The moment of your salvation is the starting line, not the finish line.

Made Him Known: We can pursue God because he has made himself known to us (e.g., God has revealed himself to us, in his Son and his book). We can only truly know God because he has revealed himself to us.

- Christ Jesus has made [us] his own. We don't go searching for God discover him. He comes searching for us and opens our eyes (e.g., Jn 15:16, "You did not choose me, I chose you."). The power to pursue God is rooted in the love God has shown to us. His is a grace that won't let go (so we can try with our might and not fear failure).

How Do We Pursue?: You can't be content with past success or discouraged by past failures but, rather, you must focus on your future goal. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

- Some of you are so ashamed of your past sins that you can't accept God's grace. You can't forgive yourself. You're always worried that you're disqualified or someone is gonna find out. You still think that righteousness is up to you and not up to God.
- Some of you are still looking back at past successes. You're satisfied with what you *did*. You're in spiritual retirement now. Victories in the past required grace in the past, but victories today require a new dependence on God today (tell me what God has done in your life; is it present or 17 years ago).
- Don't get stuck in the past, good or bad.

Focus on the future. ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Paul uses a racing metaphor, picture of a runner with body bent over, stretched out, head fixed forward. Look back and you will trip (stumble).

- It requires **forward focus** and **determined exertion** (press on).
 - Showing up to the gym and sitting down versus actually working out.
- This is a picture of straining, stretching, striving for God. There is an intense desire to know God, to understand him more, to obey him with all of you.
 - The pursuit of holiness requires you to be content in Christ but not satisfied with where you are.
- "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor 9:25-27).
 - Because Christ is worth it, we say no to some things so we can have him (like an athlete training for the Olympics).

A Mindset to Maintain: We must keep this mindset of forgetting what's behind and pressing toward what's ahead. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

- No one *drifts* toward holiness. We will be tempted to drift.
- We should keep our focus on Christ and not get diverted or distracted along the way.
 - Distraction is a great enemy. "Social Media (or TV, etc.) will prove on the last day that our prayerlessness is not due to a lack of time" (Piper). You and I have time for what we think matters.

- We will be tempted to rest on our past successes, or sidetracked by something new (stick with the fundamentals).
- Staying focused and showing up each day for what God has is huge. Press on. Don't lose heart.
 - Trust the process. Press on. Show up to church *every week*. Read your Bible *every day*. Go to small group *each week*. Pray for your lost neighbors. Share your faith.

2. A Life to Imitate (v. 17)

¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Imitation is Normal: We all imitate (e.g., style is often creative imitation). We become like what we dwell on. We are made to mimic what we love (i.e. "we are what we love").

- My 10 y.o. hates that his 6 y.o. sister copies everything he does. But he loves to copy us.
- Imitation can be annoying but it is **the normal and natural way we learn**. "Imitation is not just the sincerest form of flattery, it's the sincerest form of learning" (George Bernard Shaw).
 - There is a reason why people mimic (for good or bad) the examples that they have.

Who are You Going to Follow: It matters who you imitate (hence, why leaders matter, cf. 1 Tim 2-3, Titus, etc.). When you hitch your wagon to the wrong person it is destructive to your faith.

- He speaks to them affectionately (siblings) because they're in the same fight ("with me").
- This is why Paul invites them to "join him" (join in imitating me). It is important to find people to imitate who follow Jesus (e.g., "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ," 1 Cor 11:1). **The gospel is our measuring stick for who to imitate.** This is powerful because he wants them to follow him **not because he's achieved perfection** but because he is struggling in the same race they are running.
- There are patterns to follow and patterns to avoid. We have many models to look toward, but not all are good or equally good.
 - Some start strong but fade. Paul keeps the faith and never stops.
 - **Suffering** does not deter him. **Pain** does not stop him. Discouragement does not stop him. **Failure** does not stop him. **Shipwreck** does not stop him. **Success** does not stop him.
 - Why not one church? Why not one missionary journey? He could've settled into retirement. But he was faithful until the end.

Models Are Helpful: “We can find good examples, models of Christlikeness, who are strong where we are weak, and whose presence in our lives stretches us and helps us to grow.” And keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

- Very often I don’t learn something until I see it done (e.g., caught not taught). Discipleship can’t just be “book learnin.” People need to see the gospel through your life.
- Unfortunately, too often (even in churches), we elevate people because of fame and charisma rather than faithfulness and character. We want successful celebrities more than humble missionaries.
- That’s why Paul gave us examples of men like Timothy and Epaphroditus who risked their own lives: **honor such men** (2:29). We need to honor and celebrate the right kind of people!
 - I don’t think anyone should be the president who wants to be president.
 - I don’t think anyone should be a pastor who wants power.
 - I think we need to recalculate the kind of people we see as successful.
 - The humble, faithful, content servant of God should get infinitely more respect than the flashy, celebrity preacher who looks good on TV but has as much character as a houseplant.
 - Is there life characterized by self-promotion or God-promotion? Is there life characterized by helping themselves or serving others? Is there life characterized by accumulating wealth or giving it away? Is their life characterized by pride or humility? Is their persona built around portraying their strength or admitting their weakness?
 - In God’s kingdom, the first shall be last. Christ humbled himself before he was exalted. Too many people are exalted in this world but will be humbled in heaven. They have their reward.
 - The truth is, even Christians, have done just about as bad a job as anybody else at picking bad leaders to imitate.
- Are you imitating the right kind of people? Are you living a life worth being imitated?

Two Ways: Paul’s example vs. his enemies’ example. Paul says to imitate him **not because he is better or perfect** (cf. previous section) but **because he is pursuing Christ above all things**.

3. A Sober Warning (vv. 18-19)

¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

Enemies of the Cross: A life to be avoided (don't imitate). These bad examples are real (I have often told you) and **it's sad** (now tell you even with tears). Paul is not happy about their destruction but is realistic. Their lives demonstrate their enmity (e.g., their walk). It's not always their overt theology but the way it shows up in their behavior.

- **Imitate the wrong people, and it will destroy you.**

What Makes Them Enemies?: Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. License (contra legalism). They live for the here and now, not eternity in heaven.

- They glory in their shame. The very thing that should cause them despair is the thing they boast about. They don't sin secretly, they celebrate their sin.
 - Sexual sin is not merely acknowledged but praised. Greed isn't a sad reality but a celebrated virtue. They justify meanness as "telling it like it is." They justify disobedience to God's design as being true to themselves. No longer are we sinners in need of grace but we are self-made heroes in our own stories and no one gets to tell us we've done anything wrong.
- It's one thing to sin and feel bad about it (that is normal and good) but it's a whole 'nother thing to sin **and be proud of it**. We're all sinners, but we should repent of our sin, not flaunt it.

Don't Follow: With minds set on earthly things. Don't follow anyone who only gives you human (i.e., earthly) solutions to eternal problems.

- There is a misplaced priority on personal comfort over God (their god is their belly). **Feels like it could describe my children ("I'm hungry")**. But it shows a person who is led by their personal desires more than God's commands. They seek personal comfort more than God.
- Find someone to imitate who understands the gospel and builds their life and behavior accordingly.
- What do we have to give people?

4. A Glorious Hope (vv. 20-4:1)

²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. ^{4:1} Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

A Life Made for Heaven: We were not made for this sin-filled world. We were made for perfect fellowship with God in heaven. When we remember our heavenly citizenship (cf. 1:27) then we can live faithfully in this world.

- Your identity (i.e., whose you are) determines how you behave (**spend most of middle school looking around trying to figure who you are; jock, nerd, theater,**

fashionista, etc.). Most of us spend all our time looking around at other people to see if we can figure out who we are.

- We spend so much time looking around that we forget to look up to the God who made us and the true home he has for us in heaven.
 - One reason we feel like we don't fit in here in this world is because this world is not our home. We were made for a different world.
 - "If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world" (C. S. Lewis).
 - Stop trying to fit in and be like everyone else here. Build a life that reflects your heavenly future, not your temporary home.

Live for Heaven: We wait for heaven (from it we await a Savior)

- "Paul insists in the strongest terms that genuine Christianity, the kind that he wants imitated, lives in the light of Jesus' return. It is the kind of Christianity that joins the church in every generation in crying, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20)... It is Christianity that is preparing for heaven, for that is where our true home is, our true citizenship, our true destiny. Only such a stance is sufficient to make Paul's attitude toward suffering sensible and reasonable" (D. A. Carson).
- As long as our hope is on earth then we will be drawn to earthly solutions, but when our hope is hidden with Christ on high, then heaven will be our aim.

Conclusion:

What is the hope of heaven? "My Goal is God Himself...at any cost, dear Lord, by any road" (Oswald Chambers). The joy of heaven is the unmitigated presence of God, unbroken by sin. It is a joy which we can experience in part now (i.e., foretaste, down payment).

- Paul's Goal was not to impress, his goal was to reach the heavenly prize. **That is a life worth imitating.**
 - Have you been distracted and sidetracked by comfort?
 - Have you been weighed down by sin?
 - Is your mind focused on earthly accomplishments rather than your heavenly goal?
 - Are you living for temporary comfort or for eternal joy?
- What is your goal? What is your focus? What are you aiming for?
 - I would beg you, fix your eyes on Jesus (Heb 12:1-2).
 - Say no to every sin. Don't get distracted by this world. Look to Jesus and press on.
- You go toward what you focus on. You become what you worship. Is your joy and hope and focus on Jesus?