

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14

*Straight Talk
About Your Spiritual Maturity*

PULPIT STUDY GUIDE

Sometimes it isn't easy to look at ourselves in the mirror and give an honest self-assessment to determine if we need to improve in a given area. When it comes to asking ourselves the question if we need to focus on our spiritual maturity, most of us would likely answer yes. But what do we do once we acknowledge that we need to become more Christ-like?

The Apostle Paul answers this question in Philippians 3:12-14. This weekend, Pastor Tim is going to talk straight with us about our spiritual maturity and help us to understand Paul's exhortation to take that next step.

Group Study Questions

Straight Talk About Your Spiritual Maturity

Evaluate honestly my spiritual maturity (Philippians 12a)

1. Have someone in your group read Philippians 3:12-14. What is the “this” that Paul is referring to in v.12? Choose one.
 - a. salvation
 - b. recognition
 - c. Christ-likeness (spiritual maturity)

Read Philippians 3:4-11 for more background and discuss your answer.

2. In what ways can you be like Paul and honestly evaluate your spiritual maturity?

Philippians 3:12-14

¹²Not 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. ¹³Brothers, 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, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

3. Are you satisfied with your present level of spiritual maturity? Discuss your answer.

Warren Wiersbe said in his book *Be Joyful* (p. 96), “A divine dissatisfaction is essential for spiritual progress.” What does that mean? Discuss.

Strain specifically towards Christ-likeness (v.15)

8. Paul gave us his plan in verse 12. Now he's going to tell us how he's going to execute his plan. What does he say in verse 13?

9. As you honestly assess your spiritual growth, how would you complete the sentence in v. 13 "But one thing I do: ..."

- a. "is to dwell on the past, and assume it's too late to start growing spiritually".
- b. "watch American Idol because I can always start growing spiritually tomorrow."
- c. "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead."

Discuss.

10. What is in our past that we need to leave behind and forget? How does that hinder our spiritual growth?

11. Paul is using the analogy of a runner straining forward to finish the race with single-minded intensity. Discuss the type of extreme effort Paul is describing. How does this apply to you?

Endure continually in building my faith (v. 14)

12. Read verse 14. Again, Paul is telling to persistently press forward with great effort. How do we press on? How can we run this race with Paul's single-minded intensity? Read Hebrews 12:1-2.

13. Why do we continually seek to build our faith? What is the prize?

Introspection & Application

14. Honestly evaluate your spiritual growth. Which of the following best describes you?

- a. I don't feel convicted about my spiritual growth. In fact I don't think I need to grow anymore, thank you very much!
- b. Grow? Who has time to grow? I'm lucky to keep my head above water!
- c. I think I'm doing ok, then life just gets in the way and I get in a rut and lose focus.
- d. I really feel convicted by my lack of attention to my spiritual growth, but I just don't know where to start.
- e. Other _____

Discuss with your group or accountability partner your self-assessment. Ask for their honest feedback.

15. What do you need to forget in the past so you can strain forward for what lies ahead?

16. What is currently hindering you from taking that next step to becoming more Christ-like?

17. How can your group work together to help one another grow spiritually? Some ideas:

- Spend time in prayer and in God's word to help you determine where your heart is and to discern in what areas the Spirit of God would have you grow.
- Break into teams of two or three and honestly share with one another what is holding you back in your spiritual growth. Ask your teammate(s) to hold you accountable.
- Make a covenant as a group to take a Crossroads University class. Your group could even take a class together.

List the next steps that you plan to take as an individual and as a small group to grow more Christ-like in 2010.

Reference and Study

From the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

Philippians 3:12-14

Though Paul was a spiritual giant in the eyes of the Philippian saints, he wanted them to know that he had not yet attained the goals stated in verse 10. He was still actively pressing on toward them. He had by no means reached the final stage of his sanctification.

Paul's salvation experience had taken place about 30 years before he wrote to the Philippians. He had won many spiritual battles in that time. He had grown much in those years, but he candidly confessed he had not obtained all this, nor was he yet made perfect (v. 12). He still had more spiritual heights to climb. This testimony of the apostle reminded the saints at Philippi—and it serves to remind believers today—that there must never be a stalemate in their spiritual growth or a plateau beyond which they cannot climb.

Paul pursued Christlikeness with the enthusiasm and persistence of a runner in the Greek games. Unlike the Judaizers, whose influence was prevalent among the Philippians, the apostle did not claim to have attained spiritual maturity. He was still pressing on, pursuing that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him. Nor had he yet taken hold of it, that is, he had not yet attained perfection or ultimate conformity to Christ. But he was determined that he would forget the past and, like a runner, press on toward the goal. Paul refused to be controlled or absorbed by his past heritage (vv. 5-7) or his attainments (v. 8).

Vigorously and with concentration Paul sought to win the prize to which God had called him heavenward (v. 14). Again the Greek games must have been on his mind as he wrote of the prize. The winner in those games was called to the place where the judge sat in order to receive his prize. Paul may have referred to ultimate salvation in God's presence, or to receiving rewards at "the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10).

*Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:661

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