



**"Onward To The Prize Before Us"  
"A Sermon From The Book Of Philippians"**

**"Effective Expositions For Life"**

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# "Onward To The Prize Before Us"

Scripture: Philippians 3:10-16

## Introduction

I want to start out this introduction by saying that I never have been very much of an athlete, but I used to play high school football, and I enjoyed it very much. But, I was not a fast sprinter or long distance runner, although I always dreamed of being able to win a race if God had gifted me to do so. But because God didn't give me this ability, I tried to do other things. Yet, in those high school years little did I know that God was going to let me run in a race that was far greater than any earthly race I could have possibly ever run. That race was the race as a servant of God running diligently for the remainder of my life after I fully surrendered to the will of God just before my wife and I got married. I could never have imagined what a tremendous marathon this race was going to be, but neither could I have ever dreamed what a fruitful and productive race this one would turn out to be as well. And may I say, the prize or trophy before me now is far greater than any I could have received in an earthly race.

I am presently still running this wonderful challenging race after 50 years of ministry and over five million miles of travel. But, as we have just started out a brand New Year, I must confess that I am very much excited about the challenges and opportunities that are before me as I keep running for our precious Lord Jesus. I may not have the good health that I used to have, but with God's grace and strength, I will continue on until I cross the finish line and win the prize. What is the prize? The prize is to hear my Lord and Savior say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." If I can hear those words, then I will know that I have run the race well, finished the course by the rules, and kept the faith consistently, just like my hero, Paul the Apostle. "What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see. When I look upon His face; the One who saved me by His grace. And when He takes me by the hand and leads me through the promised land, what a day, what a day that will be!" At last I will be home!

Now, let's take a look at the following message that Paul sent to the Philippian believers, and let's see what the Holy Spirit wants to say to us as well. The New Year is here, and so are the many opportunities for us to run the race completely to the end.

## I. MOVING ONWARD REQUIRES A SUPERIOR DESIRE. vs. 10-11

In order for us to move onward to the prize before us, we must have a strong superior desire for some things that will be our priorities in this New Year. The matter boils down to what will be the preeminent desires of our hearts as we continue to run the race. In other words, what will we make as priorities this coming year? Let's see what Paul said were his priorities and see if we can also make them our priorities.

### A. Paul's desire was for a Person. v. 10a

The greatest overwhelming desire in Paul's life was that he might have a deeper experiential relationship with Jesus Christ than he had ever had. The thought is not that Paul wanted to know more about Jesus, but that he might know Jesus more experientially. May I say that this should be our supreme desire as well. In order for us to have this kind of relationship, we must deny self, die to our own selfishness, and make intimacy with Jesus the reason for our living.

### B. Paul's desire was for a power. v. 10b

The second thing that Paul desired as he looked to the future was that he might live a life under the power of the resurrected Lord. This just simply means that Paul wanted to live above the difficulties and hardships that he was going through, and he wanted to have resurrection power to be able to die to self and keep stretching for the finish line in his race for Jesus. Paul readily admitted that he could not live a victorious life while running this race on earth unless he had the marvelous power of Christ dwelling within him every day.

And, I believe if each of us will be honest, we will have to admit that we too must have this resurrection power in order to live above the suffering and hardships here on earth, and live in victory with the joy of the Lord which Nehemiah said in Chapter Eight was his strength. So my friends, if we are going to move onward to the prize before us, we must like Paul desire strongly and pray sincerely for the power of the resurrected Lord in order for us to finish the race. My question is, "Are you living your Christian life in and under the power of the resurrection?. If not, why don't you make this a priority in your life today!

C. Paul's desire was for a participation. v. 10c

Let me ask you a personal question. Have you ever ask Jesus to help you enjoy your suffering? I don't imagine you have, and neither have I. But, there have been many times during my life when I have ask God to help me get through the difficult times of suffering. In fact, when I had open heart surgery back in 2010, I asked God to help me endure the discomfort and suffering that I experienced for almost four months. And, I am happy to tell you that the Lord did minister to me in a marvelous way.

But in the latter part of verse 10 of our text, Paul says to the Philippian believers that he has a tremendous desire to identify with the fellowship of Christ's suffering. He was extremely serious in saying that he wanted to be able to endure the suffering associated with being a dedicated believer, and in the midst of the suffering, he wanted to relate his suffering to the suffering that Jesus endured on the cross for all of our sins. In other words, Paul desired that he could come through the suffering and give Christ the glory in spite of the severity of what he had to go through. In **Hebrews 12:1-2**, we find the following words, **"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."** Folks, may God help all of us to be like Paul who wrote the Book of Philippians, and I believe, the Book of Hebrews also, to come to the place along our race to the finish line that we can rejoice in the suffering we have to endure just like Jesus did. And hopefully, we will count it joy to be made ashamed because of our commitment to Christ and to personally glory in the cross whereby we are required to die to self. Maybe we should just stop right here and say a prayer to God and ask Him for the grace to count it all joy when suffering comes our way because of our testimony as a believer.

D. Paul's desire was for a parity. v. 10d

In the last part of verse 10, we find an unusual request coming from Paul the Apostle. He desired that he might be helped by God to conform to the death of Jesus Christ. In other words, he desired to share

in a parity with the suffering of Jesus. Paul desired to die completely to self and share equally in the suffering that Christ had borne on the cross for all of our sins. He just did not want Jesus to have had to pay such an enormous price for redemption while he went free of pain and suffering.

May I tell you that this is such an honorable desire from this servant of God. Instead of complaining and whining about all he had to go through and endure, Paul was ready to count all of his suffering as joy in order to identify with the suffering that Jesus endured. Of course if Jesus had not been willing to suffer and die for our sins, then we would not have been able to experience the resurrection power which we have been given because of the resurrection. Can you honestly say to Jesus, "bring on my suffering so that I can genuinely identify with your suffering?" Paul knew that if he was going to finish the race well and reach the prize that he would have to count his suffering joy and willfully die to self. I hope you can desire what Paul desired in this verse and press on to finishing well and reaching the finish line on time.

E. Paul's desire was for a purpose. v. 11

The final thing that I want to point out about Paul's superior desire is that his main purpose was that he could obtain a lifestyle of resurrected living. What do I mean by this? I mean that just like I stated in this article earlier, Paul wanted to live a life of resurrection power above the suffering and disappointments in his life. Some scholars believe that Paul was hoping to obtain a resurrected new body one day out in the future after the rapture of the church. But folks, we don't work to obtain that resurrection at all. That resurrection is promised to every born again child of God who has put his or her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and has received salvation. Therefore, I am totally convinced that Paul's purpose was to live a life under the power of the resurrected Lord in and through the indwelling Holy Spirit. And I don't know about you, but my desire is to do likewise with whatever time I have left here on this earth. May I close this thought by simply saying, "What a dynamic purpose for living!" I pray that all of us as God's children will achieve this resurrected life.

**II. MOVING ONWARD REQUIRES A SERIOUS DISSATISFACTION.  
vs.12-13a**

We now come to one of the key things that we have to do if we are going to move on to the prize before us as we finish the race God has called us to run. This key thing is that we must become seriously dissatisfied with what we have become and what we have done in our lives up to this point. The truth is that we won't strive to be and do more for Christ unless we readily confess that we have not arrived, and neither have we reached perfection or maturity up to this point. Paul was a man of tremendous transparency about his accomplishments and failures, and so must we be if we are to move on to the completion of our race and to the prize awaiting for us. Let's look at Paul's dissatisfaction and see where we might be in our status report.

A. One must be dissatisfied with his or her performance. v. 12a

In the first part of this verse twelve, Paul said that he had not already attained the place he wanted to be as a servant of God. In other words, he admitted that he had not arrived but that he had much more room to progress and keep pushing forward.

Let me ask all of you readers a question! Since the day you got saved, have you continued to run the race for Christ with faithfulness and such dedication that you now feel that you have accomplished all that you should have? I don't know what your answer is, but I know what mine is. I have not accomplished anything near what God has planned for my life. But, by using this text from Paul's writings I am challenged to move on and do much more with the call of God and the potential God has given to me. I hope you feel the same way as I do. We must confess that we will not do more until we are not satisfied with what we have done up to this point.

B. One must be dissatisfied with his or her perfection. V. 12b

The second thing Paul mentions in this verse is that he has not grown up as much as he should have. The word perfection here means to be complete or mature. So, Paul was readily admitting that he had not arrived in his spiritual growth, but that he had much room to grow and much more room to progress in spiritual understanding. And may I say that it is a great day in the life of any born-again Christian when that person confesses that he or she has not completed his or her race, but will continue on to greater maturity and perfection. And if this person has

this type of dissatisfaction, then for sure he or she will have a teachable attitude which is a must for future growth and development.

### C. One must be dissatisfied with his or her progression. vs. 12c-13a

In the last part of verse 12 and in the first part of verse 13, Paul makes a tremendous statement to the believers in Philippi. After admitting that he had not reached the highest level of performance in his life, and that he had not grown as much as he should have, Paul now says that one of his primary goals is to keep following Christ in his attempt to be worthy of the price that Jesus paid for him and for the purpose for which Christ had called him. Paul is saying to these believers that God had paid a tremendous price for him, but he had to confess that he had never really apprehended the significance of what Jesus was trying to do through him. In other words, Paul was actually saying, "I am not sure that Jesus has yet gotten His money's worth with the price He paid for me." So, Paul's dissatisfaction with his progress in the cause of Christ gave to him a strong desire to keep stretching for the finish line and completion of his ministry. Hopefully, this will be our personal desire as we keep serving Jesus and running in this race. I don't know about you, but I surely would hope that Jesus got His money's worth when He purchased me out of the bondage of sin and placed me in His race for the Kingdom of God. I just want the Son of God to at least be proud of my efforts as I try to serve Him faithfully. This will never happen if I get satisfied with my progress and don't keep pushing on for the finish line.

### III. MOVING ON REQUIRES A SINGULAR DEVOTION. vs. 13b-13d

In the last part of verse 13, Paul says, **"but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before"**. This is a very strong verse because Paul is telling the Philippian believers that he is single minded, and that his primary focus will be on moving on from the past and looking with expectancy to the future in order to finish the race that God had planned for him.

We could learn so much from Paul in this text if we would just grasp what he is saying and move on to the future in the race God has planned for us. Sad to say, most believers and most churches never reach their potential because they tend to live in the past.

A. Notice that this singular devotion is a specialized devotion.  
v. 13b

As I stated earlier, Paul's single-minded devotion was simply a focus on the future and not on living in the past. And, I will add that to focus on the failures or even the successes of the past will distract from the present and from the vision for the future. We must move on toward the prize for the calling of God in Christ Jesus.

B. Notice that this singular devotion is a suppressing devotion.  
v. 13c

Now, if we are going to forget the past then we must suppress whining about the failures and gloating about the accomplishments of the past and focus on the future. And, I would like to say that after all my years of ministry preaching in hundreds of churches across America and in other parts of the world, one of the greatest hindrances to church growth is living in the past. I just simply mean that in the minds of many pastors and church leaders, the best days of their lives were in the past. But, if these dear people will just forget the past like Paul did, then they will look with expectancy to what God has in store for them in the future. It may be hard for us to stop pondering the past but we have to if we are going to apprehend that for which we have been apprehended.

C. Notice that this singular devotion is a stretching devotion. v. 13d

The final thing that Paul says in verse 13 is that he wanted to reach forth unto those things that were before him. The word reaching here means to stretch as far as one can stretch to hit the finish line ribbon, and hopefully before the rest of the runners. My, what an effort Paul wanted to expend in order to accomplish and achieve what God had planned for his life. Paul wanted no one else to be more devoted and more committed than he was. He believed with all his heart that God deserved his best after all the Lord had done for him. This should be our mantra as well. We must do our very best in whatever time we have left. So, let's follow Paul's example and keep stretching for greater growth and greater success in the race we are running.



#### IV. MOVING ONWARD REQUIRES A STRONG DETERMINATION.

##### v. 14

##### A. Notice the effort required for this determination. v. 14a

Have you ever felt like quitting or just giving up as a believer in the work of the Kingdom of God? Well I have, probably more times than I would want to admit during my 50 plus years of serving Jesus. Yet, we find Paul writing these verses from a prison cell telling the discouraged Philippian believers that he had determined that he was not going to look back or give up, but that he was determined and resolute about going on for Jesus and reaching the goal at the finish line. He had made up his mind that the remainder of his time on earth would be given to the effort of completing the task that God had given him to take the Gospel to the world, and grow or mature into the man of God which God had called him to be. No quitting, no giving up, and no looking back, but Paul was only going to remain faithful until the race was won.

Folks, I don't know how you feel, but this is for sure what I want for the remainder of my life. So, if I live to be 80 or just a few more years, I want to stay faithful telling the world about this wonderful Lord and Savior. As I have already stated, I want to hear the words, "Well Done". I hope you feel the same way.

##### B. Notice the end result of this determination. v. 14b

Paul knew and surely we should know as well that when this life is over, we will receive the prize or rewards for our faithfulness. I don't know what all these rewards might be, but I do know that in **First Corinthians 6:1-8**, Paul told the Corinthians that they would one day judge the world here on earth, and then he told them that believers would also judge the very angels. So, from this scripture I am very much inclined to believe that during the millennial reign of Christ here on earth we will be rewarded with the privilege of helping to administer the Kingdom of God. And also based upon Paul's message to the Corinthians, we then should help rule in heaven when the thousand year reign of Christ on earth is over. We will probably be helping to hand out judgment to the fallen angels which fell with Satan when he was cast out of his position in heaven. So my friends, does it matter how faithful we are right now as we serve God here on earth? I assure you that it does.

## V. MOVING ONWARD REQUIRES A SACRIFICIAL DISCIPLINE.

vs.15-16

We now come to the last point of this message concerning moving onward to the prize before us. We cannot stop this study without taking a good look at verses 15 and 16 to see how Paul finalizes this thought about continuing on to the finish line in this race we are running. In these last two verses, Paul tells the Philippian believers that they must be well disciplined and be ready to sacrificially follow the same rules that they had followed up to that particular time if they were going to grow and be perfected in their race for the Lord. If being faithful to God had brought the believers to a good point of growth in their lives, then they must be willing to continue on by the same rules of discipline. Why should they change if they were growing in Christ as they run their race? As someone has well said, "why should we reinvent the wheel if it has gotten us to where we are?" Therefore, let's take a look at this final thought and see three points about continuing on with a life of sacrificial discipline.

A. This discipline demands a positive attitude toward growth. v. 15a

Folks, do you know why people continue to grow in their work for Jesus? The answer is that they plan to grow, and then they work their plan with a new vision for the future. When a person stops planning and loses his or her vision, there will be no more growth. So, before Paul closes this thought about moving onward to the prize before him, he just simply says to the Christians at Philippi, "don't stop, but just keep on going by the rules of the race that brought you thus far." Therefore, we must resolve to grow more as God guides us, and we need to have that teachable spirit that will allow God to reveal more of His will for us. In other words, we must have a positive attitude toward growing.

B. This discipline demands a perceptive attitude toward God. v. 15b

If we are going to receive what God wants to give us if we have this teachable spirit, then we must be very perceptive so that we won't miss His will or misinterpret His truth as He seeks to guide us on to the finish line. Jesus has promised to be with us all the way until the end of the age. Therefore, we must appropriate His presence, His power, and we must be extremely perceptive if He chooses to give us new truth and revelation in

and through His word for the future. Without a perceptive attitude, we will miss God's best for our lives all the way to the finish line. So once again my friends, do you have this perceptive attitude that will allow God to show you what He has in store as you run the race He has planned for you? I surely pray that you do!

C. This discipline demands a perpetuating attitude toward guidelines.  
v. 16

We now come to the last point in this written message given to us by God through Paul the Apostle. In this verse 16, Paul reminds the Philippian believers to not forget the rules and guidelines which have brought them to where they have come from up to this point in their lives. And, if they are going to finish the race that God has given them to run, then they must perpetuate or carry on these same rules and guidelines which they have been living by. If they change the principles and rules by which they have been serving God faithfully, they will not finish well with much rewards awaiting them. So, Paul is admonishing every one of these believers to not change the rules in the midst of the race unless they want to fall by the wayside and never finish. This is truly a great admonition for all of us.

Beloved friends, I want you to get the truth that God is trying to get across to all of us as His servants. His truth is that we should never change the methodology if this methodology is helping us to run well and achieve great success. And yet, in this modern day generation, all we hear is, "we must change the program or the methodology or we will not reach this generation." May I say very candidly that this is one of the greatest lies that has ever been told. If we have been living our lives and proclaiming the Gospel as did the early disciples and church leaders, why in heaven's name do we think we can improve on the Book of Acts program for living for Christ and for winning the world to Him? It would seem that this spiritually shallow generation wants to water down the Gospel message in order to get people to embrace it without there ever being any transformed hearts or lives. To be very honest, you might say, that we are being told that we must dumb down the message in order to win this "dumb generation" who doesn't know or even care to know the truth that God is trying to reveal to them like He did to Paul. Let's resolve today that we will go on running the race by the same Biblical rules that got us to where we are today.

## Conclusion

Let me bring this challenging sermon to an end by saying that God truly used Paul in a filthy rotten Roman prison to write this wonderful treatise called the Book of Philippians. If anyone on earth should have had a reason to be discouraged and unhappy, had several reasons in the midst of this terrible storm he was going through. And yet, Paul didn't sit in that terribly dark and damp cell feeling sorry for himself. Instead, he gave himself to writing this wonderful word of encouragement to the Philippian Christians. And the marvelous thing about Paul was that he did not show any signs of giving up or quitting because of his circumstances. He just determined that he would keep pressing onward so that he could finish his race and receive the winner's ribbon at the finish line. Truthfully, Paul gave a tremendous challenge to every born again believer to keep running, stretching, and pressing on for the finish line. Regardless of what we have to go through here on this earth, we know that the best is yet to come for the child of God. As we have heard it said so many times, "We know Who wins and we serve Him."

I do pray that these few pages may have been used by our precious Lord Jesus to encourage you to not give up, but to keep pressing onward to the prize before us. If this material has lifted you to continue on running the race well, then my efforts will not have been in vain. God bless you and just remember, I will meet you at the finish line! By the way, that ribbon will be blood red just like the blood that made this race possible!

