



In It to
Win It

Introduction

Philippians 3:12-16

A leading seminary recently surveyed its graduates to discover where it might better address any deficiencies in its program. The questionnaire asked its alumni to identify the one area in which they wish they had received better instruction. After three or four years of intense study in the original languages, systematic theology, Bible exposition, church history, and much more, where did they feel most unprepared?

The result of the survey among these seminary graduates now in the pastorate was surprising, perhaps even shocking. The most repeated answer was: **How do I live the Christian life?**

This reveals that no matter how much of the Bible a Christian has been taught, we all wrestle with how we put what we know into practice. It does not matter whether someone is a brand-new Christian or has a seminary degree, whether he sits on the back pew or whether he stands in the pulpit; all of us struggle to implement biblical truth in our daily lives. No one is exempt from this challenge.

Knowing how to become a Christian is relatively simple. The gospel declares that lost sinners are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The simplicity of the message of the cross is a reflection of the infinite genius of God. However, once someone is saved, the issue of how to live the Christian life is not so simple! Growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ involves many different factors. It demands that we deny ourselves daily, take up our cross, and follow Christ. It necessitates that we confess our sin and repent of it. It requires coming to the Lord's Table and remembering His death. It means walking in personal fellowship with Christ and with other believers. It demands that we are engaged in personal ministry, seeking to share the gospel with non-Christians, and actively living in the light of Christ's return. It takes putting on the full armor of God and resisting Satan's temptations. All this and much more is required in living a life fully devoted to Christ.

Unlike conversion, which is an immediate transaction from death to life, sanctification—growing in holiness—is a lifelong process. No one passage in Scripture contains the whole of what is required for right Christian living. The full counsel of God is needed to make known the whole truth of sanctification. We must obey all the commands, heed all the warnings, and apply all the wisdom in all of Scripture. Amid the many passages in the Bible that address Christian living, this next section of Philippians is rather obscure, and yet supplies helpful insight. In these verses, there are six aspects of right Christian living that Paul addresses. Here is how we are to live in order to honor the Lord Jesus Christ, and few texts could be more practical and relevant for our spiritual lives.¹

¹Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith* (God's Word For You Book 18) (pp. 163-164). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

Open it

1. If you were given the opportunity to be a contestant on the game show of your choice, which one would you choose? Why?

Read it

Philippians 3:12–16

Explore it

2. Looking back to our previous passage, what has Paul not yet obtained?
3. What does he resolve to do to reach his goal?
4. What two things must Paul do to be successful in his pursuit, according to verse 13?
5. What is the prize that Paul looks forward to reaching?

Apply it

“New Kids on the Block”

Paul states that this new relationship with Christ means a new pursuit after Christ: *“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3: 12). Faith is always active and dynamic, always moving us out and forward. Paul is acknowledging that he has not come to a point in his spiritual life where he can say he has arrived. There is still much spiritual growth for him to realize in his Christian life.²

6. Think back to the early days of your faith journey. What has changed in your thoughts, words, and deeds since those early days? In what ways are you satisfied by the progress so far?

7. What things allow for Christians to grow in the faith? How can being actively involved in a church help to grow believers in their walk with God?

² Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith* (God's Word For You Book 18) (pp. 166-167). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

“Don’t Give Up on Me”

If this text does nothing else, it should put an end to all dreams of sinless perfection in this life. Paul begins with an honest admission—“I’m not there yet.” Unlike so many contemporary leaders, he has no problem admitting his own personal shortcomings. He isn’t perfect yet and he knows it—and this becomes the place where his spiritual growth begins.⁴

11. How can our honesty and transparency about our struggle with sin help to bring encouragement to others around us? How can it be detrimental?

12. What quiet struggle or sin has been troubling you recently? Who from your small group are you willing to share this struggle with? Take a moment to pray for an opportunity to share your burden with them.

“Step by Step”

Forgetting what lies behind....

After Paul shares openly about being a work in progress, he speaks about his great desire to please God. In order to do that he speaks about two aspects that must be attended to, the first being forgetting. Paul is not specific as to what he wants to forget, but it seems likely that he is modeling the need to forget anything in the past that keeps us from spiritual progression in the future. Some things we might be called to forget in our past are:

- Past spiritual victories.
- Regret and shame from past sins.
- Worldly pursuits that captivated you.
- Grievances and wrongs done against us.⁵

13. From what we know of Paul, how might he have been tempted to focus on each of the four areas listed above? What about you personally?

⁴ Sermon excerpt by Ray Pritchard found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/go-for-the-gold/>

⁵ Study notes by Author

- 14. Focusing on the past can lead to a couple different things: condemnation or complacency. What advice would you give to those who feel condemned in the present because of past failure and to those who think past victories mean they can become complacent in the present?**

“Straining forward to what lies ahead”

Paul uses a term describing a runner who stretches and strains every muscle as he runs toward the finish line. “The upward call of God” is His call to salvation which culminates when we stand before Him to give an account and receive rewards for how we’ve run the race. Will our work stand the test and receive His “Well done” because we did it out of love for Him and for His glory? Or, will it be burned up and we be saved, but as through fire (1 Cor. 3:14–15)? Everything we do—how we conduct ourselves in our families and in public; how we spend our time and money; how we serve the Lord—should all be done with the mind-set, “I’m going to stand before the Lord and give an account someday; I want to be pleasing unto Him.”⁶

- 15. Where do you find yourself “straining forward” right now when it comes to your relationship with Christ? What spiritual goals and spiritual disciplines do you have that enable you to pursue greater maturity along the way?**

- 16. How does knowing that each of us will give an account regarding our Christian service motivate you towards greater service to God?**

⁶ Cole, Steven J.. *Philippians: Enduring Joy (Riches From the Word Book 1)* (p. 184). Unknown. Kindle Edition.

“The Right Stuff”

Next, Paul adds, *“if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you”* (v 15). He is alluding to the fact that there has been wrong thinking about the need to press on. The apostle is confident that God will make this known to them. This “different attitude” refers to the apathetic attitude of some in the Philippian church. For whatever reason, these believers have stopped running the race of faith with wholehearted effort. They are no longer sprinting to the finish but have adopted a spectator mentality. They are no longer pressing on as they once did but have slowed down to a casual stroll. They have succumbed to a sluggish mentality in their Christian lives and have become slack in their pursuit of holiness. So, Paul says that God will reveal this different attitude to them—he will highlight their passivity and re-ignite their spiritual fire for him. They need to be shown their need to push themselves harder in their quest for maturity.⁷

17. What things can cause a believer to become passive in their walk with God? Are there ever legitimate reasons for a believer to take a break from “straining forward” in faith?

18. What have we attained already because of Jesus Christ? How do we go about holding true to those things on a daily basis?

⁷ Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith (God's Word For You Book 18)* (p. 169). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition. This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal—www.villagebible.church/smallgroups