

# Philippians

## Study 8

by Sandy Simpson

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### Run The Race, Win The Prize!

Phil. 3:10-21

As you all know, I grew up in the island of Palau. One day I was fishing outside the reef with two of my friends. I was spear fishing while the other boys were line fishing from the raft. Very quickly, a storm came up. It came up so quickly that within minutes the waves at the reef were over ten feet high. I was pretty far away from my friends and as I looked up I saw them paddling for the reef. The last I saw of them was the long bamboo raft tumbling lengthwise, end over end, and disappearing on the other side of the reef waves. One of the boys was only 8 years old and I was afraid that he had probably died. But, at the moment, I had myself to worry about. I looked at the gigantic waves on the reef and the blowing rain and I decided that I would probably not be able to make it over the reef. I looked at the channel but I knew that the tide was still coming out and I would not be able to swim in the channel, especially with the added currents brought about by the storm. My only chance was to swim on the very edge of the channel. I knew I had to swim in far enough so that I could begin to grab the rocks on the side of the channel and pull myself in to safety.

Then my struggle began. I swam as hard as I could in between waves simply to not lose ground, then let the waves push me in a couple of feet. Then I would swim as hard as I could, and then let the waves push me another couple of feet. I did this for about 45 minutes. I had almost given up hope of seeing the coral by the channel when I spotted my first rock. I began to haul myself in, hand over hand, until I reached the inside of the reef. Exhausted, I returned to the village to tell my story.

When I returned I discovered that the boys had made it in safely and that people were worried about me. I will never forget this experience for it taught me some lessons.

Life is made up of a series of small, day to day struggles. But to strive against the problems and pressures we face today without a goal, or if we lose sight of the goal, it can be disastrous. What kept me swimming toward the inside of the reef was the fact that I had faith that the rocks would be there for me to grab on to.

God gives us in His Word, the Bible, not only instructions for how to deal with the day to day struggles of life, but the BIG picture. Seeing life clearly through God's Word can save us a lot of heartache and wasted energy. When we begin to see things from God's perspective, our struggles take on a different light. No longer are they strivings in vain, but rather we can see ourselves running a race with a firm goal in mind. We then can run with patience. Paul said of himself in **Philippians 3:13-14**:

*Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.*

To see where God wants to take you in life, you must trust in Him ... put on patience (Col. 3:12), put your life in His hands (1 Pet. 5:6), study His Word (2 Tim. 2:15), talk to Him in prayer (Col. 4:2), and follow Him where He leads (1 Pet. 2:21, John 12:27). Hang on to Jesus the Rock (Ps. 94:22, 95:1), and He will guide you through the storms of this world to the peaceful waters of eternal life.

God has a purpose for your life. That purpose is that you will grow to maturity so that you will be able to weather the storms of life. The winds of spiritual darkness and the waves of the world are frightening if we do not keep our eyes on Jesus Christ. But He wants to equip us to be able to walk through the stormy seas of life and follow Him. That will not happen if we remain spiritual babies. Babies drown in rough seas. Adults know Who to follow and how to survive.

So finish the race! Set your eyes on the goal of maturity in Christ, fill your mind and heart with His Word, and go out and put it into practice.

Paul tells us how to grow to maturity by pressing on to take hold of what Christ has for us.

*Phil. 3:10 **I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.***

Paul was resolved to know Christ and the power of His resurrection by becoming like Him in His death. That does not mean Paul had a “death wish” as we call it. It meant that Paul was pressing on to dying more and more each day to self and allowing the Holy Spirit to do the work of sanctification so that Paul could be an effective witness for Christ. We will not be made perfect in this life, except with regards to our legal standing before the Father because he sees us as believers “in Christ”. But our personal perfection is something that the Spirit begins a work on when we are born again and continues through our life. But again we must participate in this process, or more accurately we must agree to this process. Paul said he had made a choice to “press on”. This is also what every believer must do in order to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Why? Because if we do not press on, if we do not die to self, if we do not take up our cross daily and follow Christ, if we do not agree to the sanctifying work of the Lord in us, then we can shrink back and possibly be destroyed.

*Heb. 10:38-39 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.*

We must decide that we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but are of those who believe and are saved. Belief is not necessarily one moment in our lives. God sees it that way, but we are not omniscient (all knowing) so we must continue to believe and not shrink back. Paul was determined to stay the course and press on.

*Phil. 3:13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,*

*14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

To press on we need to forget what is behind. If you stay in your past, in the sins of your past, in the life of your past, in the culture of your past, you will not go forward. And going forward is a "strain". It is difficult. We have to leave behind old familiar ways, old sinful patterns, old damaging friendships with the world, old habits, and press on to the new. Why? Because there is a prize ahead. The prize is, first and foremost, to be with Jesus Christ. The second benefit is eternal life. The third benefit is a crown of life, a crown of righteousness. We are to lay up our treasure in heaven, not on this earth. That means we are to do the will of the Father now, no matter what it costs, and God will reward us in heaven where our spiritual riches will never fade away. Paul is an excellent example of this and we should follow his example. Would that we all could give our all to Jesus Christ the way Paul did. But we must.

*Phil. 3:15 ¶ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.*

*16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

Those who are mature in the faith realize that they are in a race. It is a race of time. It is a race against the enemies of the world, the flesh and the devil. It is a race that we must run if we are to prove our love for the Lord Jesus Christ and for others. Some might paint another picture of how we are to carry out the will of God, and Paul allows for that. But his point is that we must live up to what we have already attained. We have attained Sonship in Jesus Christ and justification before the Father. We now have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, not becoming overly familiar with God to the point where we no longer recognize Him as the final Judge of all. We need to realize that He has given us a great gift, but it is what we do with that gift that makes the gift count. Do nothing and the gift is useless. Run the race and live up to the gift and you will be rewarded.

*Phil. 3:17 ¶ Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.*

*18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.*

*19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.*

*20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

*21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

As I have stated we need to follow Paul's example. He is a foundational apostle of the Church and here he is not embarrassed to ask the Philippians to follow His example and join with him in running the race to the fullest. We are to take note of those who are pressing on to the mark and join with them. Conversely we are to mark and avoid those who are not.

*Romans 16:17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*

We are to emulate those who are running the race according to the commands of Christ, and to avoid those who do not because there are many enemies of the cross of Christ. What makes them enemies? Those who preach another Gospel, another Jesus, or another Spirit are enemies of the cross (2 Cor. 11:4). Those who teach heresy are enemies of the cross (Tit. 3:10). Those who falsely prophesy are enemies of the cross (2 Pet. 2:1). Paul goes on to describe those who are enemies of the cross. *Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.* The race they run is to destruction, not to reward. They are fleshly, fulfilling only fleshly appetites. They glory in themselves to their own shame. They are worldly-minded. This description describes many of the false teachers on Christian TV. All you have to do is look at how they live their lives to see that they are really enemies of the cross. Don't be fooled by their words. Listen closely and you will hear false doctrines and false prophecy. Look at their actions and you will see where they are heading. They are fleshly, glory-hungry, worldly people. We need to pray for their salvation and pray that they will stop bringing the name of Jesus Christ into disrepute.

*2 Peter 2:2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.*

*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.* Jesus Christ is coming again. We are citizens of heaven, not this earth, and Jesus will come to take us to our homeland. So true believers eagerly await His coming, unlike those who oppose the

cross of Christ who think they must take dominion over the earth or laugh at the idea of the Rapture. There are many of them today. We know that when Jesus comes that by His power **He** will bring everything under His control. We are not called to do that as the Church. Jesus will do that when He comes, and when He comes we will be changed and receive our everlasting bodies that will never wear out.

*1 Cor. 15:51-57 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but **we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.** For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. **For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.** When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. **But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***