

LESSON 5

PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL

Philippians 3:1—4:1



1 What is your favorite Summer Olympics event? Why?

2 What kind of training is necessary to become a world-class athlete?



Read Philippians 3:1—4:1, the chart “Training for the Christian Life,” and the following notes:

- ☐ 3:2, 3 ☐ 3:4–6 ☐ 3:8 ☐ 3:10 ☐ 3:12–14 ☐ 3:13, 14 ☐ 3:17 ☐ 3:17–21
☐ 3:20

3 What was Paul’s goal in life?

4 What does Paul consider worthless in comparison with knowing Christ?

5 What kind of behavior did Paul want to prevent among the believers?

6 What role does personal effort play in our Christian growth?



Paul compares the Christian life with running a race. Just as athletes place themselves under strict training and compete with all of their might, so all believers should “strain to reach the end of the race” (3:14). This means that we must place ourselves under training, discipline our bodies and minds, and watch where we are going. This leaves no place for complacency, laziness, distractions, or moral slackness. Are you playing to win? Are you in training? Are you in the race? To what degree are you “strain[ing] to reach the end of the race” (3:14)?

7 In what ways is a race an appropriate metaphor for illustrating what it means to live for Christ?

8 Review the chart “Training for the Christian Life,” and summarize your responsibilities in the process.

1 Corinthians 9:24–27



Philippians 3:13, 14

1 Timothy 4:7–10

2 Timothy 4:7, 8

9 Which of these areas of training is the easiest or most natural for you? Which demands the most effort, concentration, and discipline?

10 What picture (athlete, soldier, etc.) is most meaningful to you in describing what is involved in “strain[ing] to reach the end of the race” (3:14) in your Christian growth? Why?

11 Paul considered all his past accomplishments worthless for the sake of Christ. How can our past accomplishments and honors sometimes get in the way of our growth in the Lord?

12 What does it mean to forget “the past” (2:13)? What does it mean to look “forward to what lies ahead” (3:13)? How do we “reach the end of the race” (3:14)?

13 In what ways do you need to get more serious about running the race of the Christian life? Identify one or two areas where you need to discipline yourself more effectively. What could you do to improve the effectiveness of your training?



A Why would Paul’s background have been a source of pride to him before he became a Christian? Why was he so willing to give it up for Christ? How can pride hinder our relationship with Christ?

B What does this passage tell us about the coming resurrection?

C How is the exhortation to rejoice in the Lord a safeguard for believers?

D In this passage, Paul is highly critical of two groups of so-called Christians: the Judaizers (3:2, 3) and the overindulgent (3:18, 19). How did they distort the gospel and thus distract sincere believers from knowing and applying its truth? What individuals or groups try to distract believers today? What should be done to correct these harmful teachings and practices?

E What does it mean to “put no confidence in human effort” (3:3)? Why is that important?

F Drawing from this whole chapter, what does Paul mean by the phrase “know Christ” (3:10)? What more is involved than simply believing in Jesus as God’s Son?

G How does righteousness by faith set us free to grow in our knowledge of Christ and in his service?

H How can we keep the foundation of our past growth in Christ from crumbling away?

I Why do we sometimes fail to “obey the truth we have learned already” (3:16)?

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