

"PRESS ON: PURSUING THE UPWARD PRIZE" PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16

This Week's Core Competency

Single-mindedness – I focus on God and his priorities for my life. Matthew 6:33 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

Olympic athletes are perhaps the most single-minded people on earth. I ran across this thumbnail sketch of a typical Olympian's training regimen online. Research on British athletes training for the 2012 London games reveals that the average athlete:

- * Consumes more than 1.1 million calories per year, equivalent to eating three Christmas dinners a day.

- * Commits six hours a day, six days a week to training and competitions.

- * Has been working towards their Olympic or Paralympic goal for 11 years.

- * Seriously took up their sport at the age of 14 and now competes in seven international competitions per year.

An average elite male canoeist, such as World Champion Ed McKeever, lifts a total of 1,200 tons a month—the equivalent of six blue whales—during his strict gym workouts. An elite swimmer, such as Olympic silver medalist Joanne Jackson or European and Commonwealth champion Fran Halsall, swims more than 1,860 miles a year—further than the distance from Beijing to London over four years.

And then there's the financial cost. American bobsled driver Jazmine Fenlator knows this

Single-mindedness in spiritual things, as in athletics and business, boils down to attention and intention.

firsthand. "Going into the Olympic year, I told myself, 'I'm making every sacrifice,'" said Fenlator, who has worked odd jobs from creperie manager to dog walker to support her athletic ambitions and received financial aid from her community and sponsor Liberty Mutual Insurance. "I'm putting all my eggs in one basket and I'm going for broke. At the end of the day, if I'm in debt for it, then I am. But the glory of the journey is worth it for me. I have the rest of my life to work at a desk and do what I need to do to pay that debt off. I only have this limited time now to push myself to the max." Fenlator, 28, called bobsled "one of the most expensive Olympic sports next to equestrian." She estimates it personally costs her \$80,000 a year to compete.

Businessmen and women are another group of single-minded people. The small business owners I know are preoccupied people. They have their minds on their businesses constantly; they do business 24-7. Like chess players, they strive to stay a few moves ahead of what's happening in the marketplace, continually picking their own brains as well as the brains of others for innovative changes that will position them to deliver the product or service that customers will want next the way they will want it delivered, knowing they won't be in business for long if they don't—or if they're wrong. It's a high-pressure, winner-take-all, loser-go-home game we see played out stereotypically on reality television. Viewers can't seem to get enough of *Shark Tank* and *Shark Tank* wannabes like *Supermarket Superstar* and *The Profit*, and business turnaround shows like *The Bar Rescue*, *Restaurant Stakeout*, and *Restaurant Impossible*. It's easy to become obsessed with the drama, much

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of it provided by employees, that surrounds running a successful business.

When it comes to spiritual things, Paul has got to be the most focused Christ follower who ever lived. On his single-minded commitment to Christ he writes: "Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (2Co 11:21b-29).

And yet, he did not think that he had "arrived" spiritually, so to speak, and he told the Philippians as much. "Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already been perfected—but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded [one thing I do, NIV]: Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead, with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Php 3:12-14, NET).

Single-mindedness in spiritual things, as in athletics and business, boils down to *attention* and *intention*. Spiritual growth doesn't just happen. It requires our attention. We have to attend to spiritual things. We have to stay in the Word and reflect in solitude and silence on our own spirituality. It also demands that we intentionally pursue the goal of maturity. Wanting to be like Jesus isn't enough; we have to train to be like him. We have to deliberately do those things that the Spirit of God will use to transform us.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Philippians 3:12-16

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. 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.

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.

Cf., another translation

12 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. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. (NASB)

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline "all this" in v. 12.
- * Circle "perfect" in v. 12.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 12.
- * Highlight "take hold," "took hold," and "have taken hold" in vv. 12 and 13 respectively.
- * Circle "yet" in v. 13.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 13.
- * Bracket "forgetting" and "straining" in v. 13.
- * Underline "press on" in v. 14.
- * Circle "the prize" in v. 14.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. In verse 12 Paul says, "Not that . . . but." What makes you think that he *has* or *has not* obtained what he's after?
2. According to verse 12, "all this" amounts to what?
3. Explain the *contrast* in verse 12.
4. To what does "it" refer in verse 13a?
5. Identify the imagery ("forgetting," "straining") Paul uses in verse 13.
6. Identify the *literal* goal and the *literal* prize to which the figures refer.
7. That imagery extends into verse 14. Identify the *figurative* "goal" and the *figurative* "prize" to which he refers.
8. Paul refers to "such a view of things" in verse 15. What *view* is that?
9. Put verse 16 in your own words.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

Philippians 3:12-16 must be understood in light of its surrounding context: 3:1-11 and 3:17-4:1. In verses 1-11 Paul warns his readers "to watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh" (v. 2). He has in mind those Judaizers who require circumcision and consider themselves spiritually superior because they themselves are circumcised. Their view seems remote to us because circumcision is considered of no consequence nowadays. Perhaps requiring circumcision would be analogous to requiring a sacrament for salvation or expecting a manifestation of some spiritual gift as the mark of spiritual maturity. In contrast to them, although he has plenty of reasons to boast, Paul considers all his spiritual pedigree and personal accomplishments rubbish in comparison to "the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus" (v. 8). In verses 17-21 he exhorts them to follow his example and take note of others who do also—perhaps with a view to imitating them, perhaps with a view to avoiding those who don't. In 4:1 he tells them "that is how you should stand firm in the Lord."

One commentator summarizes what the apostle is doing this way: "In 3:12-4:1 Paul turns away from the possibility that the Judaizers will make inroads into the Philippian congregation to two other possible problems. (1) He is worried that his teaching about losing all things in order to gain Christ will be misunderstood to mean that he has already arrived at spiritual perfection. (2) This concern leads him to warn the Philippians against becoming enemies of Christ's cross by making gods of their stomachs, glorying in that of which they should be ashamed, and setting their minds on earth things. He concludes the entire section of warnings (3:1-21) with an admonition to stand firm in the Lord (4:1)" (Frank Thielman, *The NIV Application Commentary: Philippians*, 193).

In verses 12-16 Paul addresses the first of the

two possible problems. In 12-13a he assures his readers that he has not "arrived," spiritually speaking. In spite of what he says about himself in verses 7-11, he doesn't want his readers to conclude that he is spiritually perfect; his ultimate sanctification still awaits the resurrection from the dead at the future return of Christ (v. 10). He repeatedly states that he is imperfect, or in other words, that he has not obtained the Christlikeness God purposes for him. First he says, "Not that I have already obtained . . ." and then he says, "or have already been made perfect," and finally, "I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold . . ." each time leaving the object of his statement unspecified. The NIV adds "all this" and "it" after the verbs to clarify what he means. And while he doesn't spell it out, clearly he has his spiritual maturity or conformity to the likeness of Christ or complete perfection in mind. In 13b-14 he tells them exactly what he is going to do about his imperfection, thereby revealing his single-minded, goal-oriented focus. He intends to "press on toward the goal," which he identifies in verse 12 in these words, "to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me," and in verse 14 in these slightly different words, "to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (cf., Ro 8:29). In order to succeed in his quest he means to leave his past failures as well as his past accomplishments behind and to strain toward the goal that lies ahead. "Like a runner who knows that a backward glance at ground already covered will only slow his progress toward the finish, Paul says that he forgets what is behind and stretches out toward what is ahead, so that he might complete the race and win the prize" (Thielman, 196). In 15-16 he advises them to take the same view of things.

The Message of the Passage

Don't rest on your laurels or waste time lamenting your past failures; instead, single-mindedly press on toward spiritual maturity.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 12 **all this** "Although the NIV supplies the phrase 'all this' after the verb 'obtained' in verse 12, the Greek text leaves the object of the verb unexpressed. Literally, Paul's Greek reads, 'Not that I have already obtained, or have already been made perfect.' The effect of this is to focus the reader's attention fully on the notion that Paul knows he is not perfect. In English we obtain the same effect when we say, 'John thinks that he has arrived.' The word 'arrived' has no qualifier to tell us at what John thinks he has arrived. Thus all the emphasis is placed on the verb and the attitude of haughtiness it conveys" (Thielman, 195). "What he has not yet 'obtained,' therefore, is the eschatological realization of the goal expressed in vv. 10-11, the kind of knowing of Christ that will be his only when he has 'attained unto the resurrection from the dead'-or its equivalent, as vv. 20-21 clarify" (Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT, 343).

v. 12 **perfect** Cf., "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is" (1Jn 3:2). "The perfection he has in view needs careful definition. A backward glance at the preceding verse with its reference to the resurrection of the dead suggests that what he has in mind is that perfection which will be his only at the resurrection; and this state he obviously has not yet attained . . . By his allusion to the future resurrection he makes it clear that the work of sanctifying grace is progressive, that the believer lives within the tension of salvation begun now but not yet final, and that the *summum bonum* of Christian experience will be reached only at the parousia or coming of Christ" (Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, TNTC, 154-55).

v. 12 **press on** "The verb *dioko*, translated here and in verse 14 press on, is a hunting word meaning 'I pursue'; it is also used of foot-racing. It is a strong expression of active and earnest endeavour. It is correlative with take hold in a number of passages (Rom. 9:30; cf. Ex. 15:9; 2 *Clement* 18:2) in the sense of 'pursue and overtake', 'chase and capture'. This gives an excellent sense. The apostle presses forward in his Christian course in the full recognition that he is not yet perfect, but lives in confidence of ultimate salvation" (Martin, 155). "In verse 12 he says that he presses on to take hold of the goals listed in verses 8-11, choosing a pair of words that could, in military contexts, refer to the pursuit of one army by another. Together the two terms connote a single-minded attempt to reach a particular goal" (Thielman, 195).

v. 12 **take hold** Lit., "to take hold of that for which I also was laid hold of by Christ Jesus." The passive has been translated as active in keeping with contemporary English style.

v. 13 **taken hold** The object of Paul's quest, i.e., his goal, is nuanced a bit differently by commentators. One writes, "Here again the object of the verb is either the full knowledge of Christ, of which a foretaste was given at his conversion, or the blessedness of the resurrection" (Martin, 155). Another takes it as: "the knowing of Christ which can only be Paul's when the eschatological goal, referred to in terms of the resurrection from the dead in v. 11, is realized at the coming of Christ (cf. vv. 20-21)" (Fee, 342). Still another refers to it as "spiritual perfection" (Thielman, 194), and one last one, as "perfection or ultimate conformity to Christ," i.e., "Christlikeness" (Robert P. Lightner, "Philippians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 661). All of which pertain to ultimate sanctification.

v. 13 **forgetting** "Forgetting what is behind is a glance at the apostle's past life, whether in regard to his Jewish prerogatives which are enumerated in verses 5-6, or in reference to his past experiences as a Christian, the successes and failures, triumphs and miseries which came to him as an apostle" (Marin, 156). Paul, as a runner, refuses to be distracted by other things, in particular things in his past.

v. 13 **straining** "It is the picture of a runner who strains every effort to press forward in the race. The prospects of the finishing post and the prize of victory spur him on so that he 'may finish the race' (Acts 20:24). To do this he must 'run without swerving' (1 Cor. 9:26, Moffatt), and with the utmost effort" (Martin, 156-57).

v. 13 **prize** I.e., ultimate sanctification in terms of the full knowledge of Christ, complete conformity to his image, spiritual perfection, being rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ.

v. 15 **mature** Cf., "perfect" (NET, NASB). "When Paul applies this word [*telios*] to believers, it has the connotation not of perfection in the ultimate sense but of the maturity necessary to distinguish the wisdom of God from the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 2:6; cf. Col. 1:28) and to use spiritual gifts appropriately (1 Cor. 14:20; Eph. 4:11-13) . . . In Philippians 3:15, then, maturity is a matter of refusing to focus on the spiritual attainment of the past and of realizing how much effort must be expended on the course that lies ahead" (Thielman, 196-97).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Do you know why the lights come on when you flick the switch? Thomas Edison could've told you. He invented the light bulb more than 130 years ago. Edison also thought of nearly 1,100 other things that improved the world, including a power generator to make electricity, a record player to record and play back words and music, and a movie camera to film moving pictures. Edison didn't hear as well as the other kids, so he couldn't understand everything the teacher said. Finally, when he was 10, his mother pulled him out of school and gave him books to read. She had been a schoolteacher and knew how to make learning fun for her son. Chemistry and science were Edison's favorite subjects. His mother helped him set up a laboratory in his room, but quickly had him move it to the basement because he spilled chemicals and ruined the floor and furniture. Edison enjoyed experimenting and improving other inventions. Because he wasn't a fast learner early on in life, he realized the importance of never giving up. And it's a good thing, since it took him more than 1,500 tries to make the light bulb work perfectly. Our text today urges us to press on in our spiritual journey. Let's make a commitment this year to persevere in the faith and finish well.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Php 3:12-16
"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: _____ what is behind and _____ toward what is ahead. I press on toward the _____ to win the _____ for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Php 3:13-14).

What Do You Think

What helps you keep going when you feel like quitting? Read Philippians 4:13 to find out where Paul gets his strength.

What R U Going To Do

Gather your family and have an Endurance Olympics. Who can run in place the longest? Balance on one foot the longest? Do the most sit-ups? Whistle the longest? Have fun learning to persevere!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Single-mindedness - I pay attention to the important things God has for my life.

Memory Verse

No Memory Verse this week!

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.