

PHILIPPIANS

JOY ON THE JOURNEY

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Philippians 3.12-16
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I. Connecting With One Another

When was the last time you ran after something or someone? Why did you do so?
Have you ever figuratively chased something? What was it? Did you get it?

II. Introduction to this Study

Philippians 3.12-16 follows closely on the heels of 3.1-11, the passage we studied last week, where Paul boldly declares his past identity and accomplishments are "garbage" in comparison to knowing Christ Jesus. Separated by nearly 2,000 years though we are, many of the things Paul held dear, we do as well - and rightly so! As we discussed in last weekend's message, they are good things. As becomes even clearer in verses 12-16, however, Paul lets go of those good things in order to instead seek after the Best, Jesus.

Paul goes so far as to say that he forgets what is behind and strains toward what is ahead. This is a bold statement for the Apostle, since before he was found by Jesus, he persecuted the church! So, he wasn't only letting go of the good things to chase after the best thing; he was letting go - forgetting, even! - his past sins to "press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of [him]."

III. Study the Text

- a. Read, again, Philippians 3.1-11. See if you can summarize what Paul's main point in these verses.

Now read Philippians 3.12-14. There are two main ideas in these three verses. In your own words, what are they? What is their connection with verses 1-11? (Or, to think about it in another way, what came into Paul's mind immediately after writing verse 11 that prompted him to continue with verse 12?)

- b. In verse 12, Paul writes, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

To what do you think he is referring in this verse? Is he referring to salvation? Or something in addition to salvation?

Check out Matthew 13.44-46 for an interesting parallel parable from Jesus' ministry.

- c. Paul continues, stating in verse 13, "I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it." How do you understand this statement in light of the beginning of verse 9, where he writes that he's been "found in Him (Jesus)"?

Elsewhere, in Romans 8.18-30, Paul offers some interesting thoughts in this vein. Read it through, noting especially verses 28-30.

What do you think he means when he writes "And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified"? And what does suffering have to do with this process?!

Predestined → Called → Justified → Glorified

- d. In the second half of verse 13, Paul asserts that he forgets what is behind and strains toward what is ahead. But is “forget” how we should understand it? Reread verses 4-11 to see if he’s really forgotten.

Is forgetting even really possible!? The Greek word could also be translated as “neglect” or “no longer care for,” which gets to Paul’s original intent: namely that he no longer hangs his hat on the identity and accomplishments of his past.

One scholar puts it this way: “Paul has not forgotten his past. He has reconceived it from the perspective of one who is now in Christ, but it is not forgotten. In fact, it is quite clear that it is only now, from the perspective of being in Christ, that Paul can offer a truthful account of his past. His ability to ‘press on toward the goal’ can be sustained only by the truthful account of his past he is now able to narrate.”

- e. This practice of reconceiving the past is very important for Paul, not only in light of the “good things” listed in verses 1-11 that we discussed last week. Paul also has some past sins he reconceives. If you’re unfamiliar with his story, be sure to read Acts 7.54-8.3, where he’s referred to as Saul.
- f. Read verses 15-16. In these words lies the punch line to a humorous little wordplay that is lost in our English translations: The word translated “perfect” in verse 12 and “mature” in verse 15 are the same Greek word, *teleios*. Essentially, then, Paul is saying, “Though I haven’t yet been perfected, since I haven’t been perfected, I’ve been perfected” or “Though I haven’t yet arrived, since I haven’t yet arrived, I’ve arrived.” There’s an already-but-not-yet element to his thoughts, so he continues to strive after Jesus. Even though he’s been found in Jesus, he continues to seek after Jesus!

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Reflecting on last week’s study guide, how has being found in Jesus led you to seek after Him as well? What connections do you see between the way you were found and the way you try to seek after Him?
- b. How does knowing that you, as a follower of Jesus, having been predestined and called by God reframe your spiritual journey? How does that help you understand God’s work justifying you in your faith? How about being glorified?
- c. How does “neglecting” or “no longer caring for” your past sins help you forge ahead in seeking to know Jesus?
- d. In what areas would you like to grow in knowing Jesus?

V. Pray

Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Thank God for the relationships made and nurtured at last week’s Halloween Carnival, and pray that the seeds which were planted would bloom into faith;
- b. For this week’s worship gatherings, that God would prompt each of us to see ways in which we can grow deeper in our walk with Him;
- c. For the children and students of Good Shepherd: That they would grow in their knowledge of Jesus through the programs and classes of our faith community.