

WARM-UP

- Who would you consider the greatest athlete of all time? What do you think made this person great?
- Are you the kind of person who would participate in a game even without a prize? Recall an instance explaining this.
- Recall a time when you had to do something different (e.g., move to a different city or change jobs) but had a hard time because you preferred what was comfortable. What happened?

WORD *⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death . . .*

PHILIPPIANS 3:8-10

(Read also **PHILIPPIANS 3:4-7**.)

To a Jew or Pharisee—those who had grown up being taught to obey the law of Moses—Paul’s list of credentials was impressive, even faultless. He had been circumcised in accordance with the law; he was from the tribe of Benjamin, the lineage of the kings; he was a Pharisee, one of the strictest religious sects during his time who took the letter of the law literally. But in his epistle, Paul showed the Philippians that he considered all of these achievements as worthless and insignificant compared to the overwhelming joy he felt in knowing Christ. He was set on achieving only one thing—to

know Christ and to become like Him. In this lesson, we will look at how we can persevere in our pursuit of Christ as demonstrated by Paul.

1 | Forget what lies behind.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind . . . **PHILIPPIANS 3:13**

Paul knew that he hadn't yet received his prize. There was only one course of action—to press on. He did this by *forgetting what lies behind*. Like Paul, we have to stop looking at the things in our past. Keeping our eyes on what's behind us will hinder us from seeing what's before us. Whether they be accomplishments or failures, the things in the past can keep us from stepping forward. How did God enable you to overcome something in the past that kept you from pursuing His purpose in your life?

2 | Strain forward to what lies ahead.

. . . and straining forward to what lies ahead . . . **PHILIPPIANS 3:13**

Paul understood that not yet receiving the prize meant there were greater things waiting for him in the days ahead. Each day meant another chance to discover more of God, enjoy his freedom in Christ, and become more like Him. It also meant reaching more people who were waiting to experience the reality of Christ in their lives. Like Paul, we need to *strain forward*, exerting effort to take those necessary steps, in faith that God is leading us to accomplish His will. Sometimes it's not the things of the past that keep us from moving forward, but the comfort of the present. Paul encourages us to strain forward and continue our diligent pursuit of Christ. Why must we not be comfortable where we are?

3 | Set your sights on the goal.

. . . I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. **PHILIPPIANS 3:14**

The reason Paul was able to overcome suffering and have joy was that his eyes were set on the prize. His prize was not just what he could accomplish on earth for God, but knowing God Himself, learning to trust Him more everyday, and becoming more and more like Christ. Since he surrendered his life to Christ, Paul's motivation for everything he did for God was to know Him and experience His reality on earth, until the day he would meet Him in heaven. In the same way, we are to focus our eyes on Jesus. Regardless of what we are facing at this time, we can overflow with joy knowing that they are all temporary. We can continue pursuing Christ no matter what because we know that in the end, we will gain Him for eternity. How have you experienced the joy of the *surpassing worth of knowing Christ* and how did this change the way you live your life?

APPLICATION

- Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you anything in your past or present that hinders you from moving forward. Talk to someone who can help you and pray with you to overcome this.
- How would setting your sights on the ultimate goal of gaining Christ change a specific area in your life? What is something you can do differently starting this week in line with this?
- Thank God for the enduring joy that comes from pursuing Christ. Ask Him to give you opportunities to share that joy to your family and friends this week.

