



GOSPEL  
*partnership*

DEVOTIONALS 7

# PHILIPPIANS 3:12-4:1

<sup>3:12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

<sup>17</sup> Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. <sup>18</sup> For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

<sup>4:1</sup> Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

# DAY 1

PHILIPPIANS 3:12

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

What is the “this” and the “it” Paul had not yet attained, but for which he is willing to lose everything? The answer is found in looking back to what Paul has just said (vs. 7-11) where he contrasts the life he lived as a religious man with the life he now has in Christ. The contrast is between what is spiritually dead and what is spiritually alive, what is temporal and what is eternal, and what can be attained by human effort and what can come only from the Spirit of God. Paul knows that what Christ offers surpasses any other way to live, for only in him can we be relieved of the crushing load of our guilt and have a right standing and relationship with God. Only in Christ can we triumph over suffering and death. This resurrection life found only in Christ is Paul’s gift and his goal.

Paul was blind to this all-surpassing treasure until he met Jesus on his way to Damascus. He had undoubtedly heard about the amazing miracles and a resurrection, but he saw no glory there. The veil of legalism covered his mind and hardened his heart. But standing before Light, he saw the folly of forfeiting what would endure forever by refusing to let go of what he could not keep. Paul found the treasure, the pearl of greatest price, and like the merchant in Jesus’s parable, sold everything. Do you think the merchant complained about the price? He recognized the opportunity and gladly exchanged what he had for it. So Paul gladly gave everything for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ and being claimed by him.

Are you surprised that Paul said he had not yet obtained this life? What about his dramatic conversion and the subsequent revelations he could not even describe? Paul must have glimpsed the glory that will be our future inheritance. He must have understood salvation is comprehensive and expansive, including a past justification, a present sanctification, and a future glorification. The goal of receiving this complete salvation inspired him to press on, to keep working out in his life what God had worked in. Paul did not have the simple, uncomplicated life that often appeals to us. He did not have a permanent home, a loving family, perfect health or protection from hardship. But Paul simplified his life by his undivided heart. He had one goal; what did not serve that purpose was not part of his life. Or to say it another way, what came his way was transformed by serving his goal of resurrection life.

I’m guessing that none of us live uncomplicated lives. We are confused by too many choices. Exhilarating joy and crushing disappointment live together in us. We have loving relationships and very difficult ones. Most things don’t quite live up to our anticipation or expectation. But we are pressing on together! We have one goal and are practicing keeping our eyes fixed on it. We are working out our salvation as we contribute our individual gifts, learning and laughing together, worshiping and weeping together. We often meet together at an amazing place—the throne of grace. We hold our Christ-light up for our neighbors and for the world. We have our eye on the prize!

## PRAYER

*Gracious Father, salvation is from you. Thank you for such an amazing gift! And thank you for teaching us through your servant Paul. Merciful Savior, you are worthy of anything we could give you! We offer ourselves again as we work together to be light wherever you put us. We love you for walking with us through our joys and deep sorrows. It will be worth it all when we see you, Jesus! Amen.*

-Judy Vander Ark

# DAY 2

PHILIPPIANS 3:13-16

<sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. <sup>16</sup> Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Paul makes a remarkable statement at this point in Philippians. On the one hand, it's not surprising, given that earlier in the letter he is downplaying any significance in his heritage or works, but rather views all of that as "rubbish" when compared to the knowledge of Christ. Yet Paul articulates again that he is more concerned with what God has planned for him to come--namely, knowing Christ in fullness--rather than focusing on any shame, guilt, pride, or self-worth he may have felt before.

It's important to consider what Paul is referring to in his first statement: "I do not consider that I have made *it* my own." What might Paul be talking about? In context, "it" is pointing to Paul's knowledge of Christ. He's again telling the Philippians that he only has partial knowledge--that he has not completely grasped the significance of Christ. It's quite a remarkable statement from the apostle. If Paul still hasn't fully grasped the weight and significance of the long-awaited Messiah and Lord Jesus Christ, then it is equally true for those he was writing to and for you and me today.

It seems appropriate to stop here and ponder the magnificence and significance of Christ. In its unified story, the Bible points to Jesus as the Messiah, the promised one who would come and rescue God's people. Stop and reflect on this truth. Consider writing or saying a prayer of adoration to God about this truth. Carry this prayer with you throughout the day as a reminder of the lengths to which God has gone to rescue you and me, and all those that trust in the name of Jesus.

Paul continues on, pressing forward, for what? What does Paul want to express and convey to his dear brothers and sisters in Philippi? His sole concentration is on what is in front of him--the full and complete knowledge of Christ Jesus. This is the goal and will be the prize when Paul's race has been run. The language that is used here is vivid, drawing to mind that of a runner fully stretched out, body in a bent-over position, hands out-stretched, face firmly fixed forward, never looking over his shoulders, with eyes glued to the goal of knowing Christ Jesus in full. I'm not a very good runner. I do it mainly because the sport I love makes you. Yet I did run track in high school. When you run with your whole posture fixed on the goal, it takes great concentration and discipline to run toward it. Paul here is saying, "Dear Jesus-follower, keep your eyes on the goal of knowing Jesus Christ. Concentrate. Focus. Keep your eyes on the goal." May it be so.

## PRAYER

*Father in heaven, give us eyes for Jesus. Grant us a posture that yearns for the goal of knowing Christ fully. This world gives us so many distractions, so many chances to have our eyes, face, arms, legs, and whole body focused on other things, usually good things. May we recognize this through the Spirit, repent, remove, and re-focus on our King Jesus. Strengthen us this day and every day that we might, like Paul, forget what lies behind and strain for what is in front, King Jesus. In his name, we pray. Amen.*

-Addison Hawkins

# DAY 3

PHILIPPIANS 3:17

<sup>17</sup> Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

They say that imitation is the best form of flattery. So who are you flattering? Or, in other words, who are you imitating?

These words of Paul may sound a little odd to our ears. Isn't Paul acting a little proud here? Is he suggesting that he has it all together? While Paul's call for imitation is a little different than we are used to hearing, he is not doing this from a place of pride. Consider, first, that he recognizes there are many others "who walk according to the example you have in us." Paul does not hold himself up as an exclusive model for life, but rather says that following Christ is a group project. Second, don't forget that Paul has begun this section by saying that he is pressing on to take hold of his life in Christ "because Christ Jesus has made me his own" (v. 12). When Paul is calling the Philippians to imitate him, he is really calling them to imitate the life of one who has been arrested and taken hold of by Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." In the end, as always, Paul is ultimately pointing to Christ.

So let's go back to the more present questions of imitation. Whose life is so Christ-filled that you are drawn to imitation? Note that being Christ-filled is not the same as being morally upright. Remember, Paul takes all the inheritance markers and zealous pursuits that were for his "profit" and counts them as "loss" for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ (cf. Phil 3:8). He begins this section by saying that he is not perfect, but he is straining toward this goal of being found in Christ (cf. 3:12). In whom do you see this single-minded pursuit? Who is pressing into Christ in humility? In study? In sacrifice? To whom are you showing this single-minded pursuit? That is the other side of this question, isn't it? For as much as we need to seek those who are showing us the way, we also need to be people who are showing others the way of being found in him, our beautiful Savior.

# PRAYER

*Jesus, thank you for so taking hold of sisters and brothers around us so that we have models to imitate. Thank you for giving us evidence in the lives of others that following you, though not always easy, is the best. Take hold of us in such a way that others see you in us and are encouraged.*

-Andrew VanderMaas



# DAY 4

PHILIPPIANS 4:18-19

<sup>18</sup> For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup> Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

*Enemy* is a strong word. We ought not throw around that title lightly toward others, for every woman and man is a fellow image-bearer. Yet Paul reserves this name for a certain kind of person doing a certain kind of thing. They are the people whom he described back in earlier chapters who “preached Christ out of envy and rivalry” and were filled with “grumbling and questioning.” There are several ideas as to who Paul is referring to here: Jewish Christian legalists, Jewish Christian hedonists, or Gentile Christian hedonists. Whoever they were, their walk didn’t match their talk. But Paul rejoices in the fact that despite their hypocrisy, Christ is proclaimed.

Yet we find the Apostle Paul telling his friends in Philippi of his deep sadness over these so-called enemies as well. First, we must note that whatever their cause was, the situation weighed heavily on Paul. Second, we notice that Paul is grieved specifically by their actions. John Calvin says of these people that “while they pretended to be friends, they were, nevertheless, the worst enemies of the gospel.”

These people had received the good news of Jesus Christ. But sadly, their manner of life was so utterly inconsistent with the very message they preached that Paul was moved to tears. Finally, Paul was not only sad because of how their hypocrisy affected him personally, he was also deeply moved because he recognized that they were on the path to destruction. Their god was their stomach (i.e. their unbridled appetite and lusts); their glory was in their shame (i.e. immoral practices); their mind was on earthly things (i.e. their sensual pursuits).

Such people cherished a fond belief in their “freedom” to live however they wanted. As one commentator puts it, “They played fast and loose with morality.” Somehow along the way, they had lost the very gospel in their personal lives that they were sharing with others.

What is unique about this passage is that Paul brings this up not necessarily to rebuke them but to cry over them. As we will see in the passage for tomorrow, Paul recognizes that those who preach Christ and are in Christ have their citizenship in heaven, where they will share in Jesus’s glory. Paul’s heart breaks that these women and men are scoffing at their heavenly home and pursuing the fleeting things of this world. Paul’s tears show us that he longs for the gospel of Jesus to be vindicated and for these people to be reconciled to the One that they hypocritically profess.

When you look out at the church (remember, Paul is talking about “Christians” here), how do you see people’s lives grow distant and inconsistent from the way of Jesus? How does that make you feel?

At one time in Paul’s life, he would’ve reacted very differently to those that he viewed were violating the purity of God’s message. Paul was a deadly persecutor of the church! But on the road to Damascus, Paul met the Lord Jesus and his heart was transformed. Paul met the Jesus who wept, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!” (see Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-44). Paul met a Savior that longed to take on the wrath that people deserved so that they might be reconciled to God.

## PRAYER

*O Father in heaven, you deserve all the glory. All of heaven and earth and we, your image-bearers living in it, are temples ordained for your praise. Yet we cannot escape the fact that this world is filled with powers at work to desecrate your name--at times very overtly and at other times even from within your body. Teach us to weep for these. Give us the heart of Christ that longs for all people to truly know you and walk in your light. Amen.*

-Masakuni Hotta

# DAY 5

PHILIPPIANS 3:20-4:1

<sup>3:20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

<sup>4:1</sup> Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

This is the second time in Philippians we have heard Paul remind his readers about their citizenship in heaven. The first was in 1:27. That verse primarily addressed one's behavior as a citizen of heaven living on earth. Behavior needed to be above reproach on earth because believers in Christ reflect the good news about Christ and the coming heavenly kingdom.

This passage is more about the political reality of having a citizenship and allegiance that transcends that of Rome. Even though it was located in Greece, Philippi was as Roman as it could be. Much of the population was made up of former Roman soldiers. Their language was Latin, the language of Rome. The majority of inscriptions found by archaeologists in Philippi are in Latin. Philippi's location on the major east-west travel route meant that the city played a significant role in keeping the Pax Romana (Peace of Rome), established 75 years earlier under Augustus. While it was a small colonial city, Philippi was on equal footing with the cities in Italy. Paul's readers must have been reminded of Rome every time they walked outside. Caesar was Lord in Philippi. He was the well-established governing power.

Paul sets forth the parallel and opposing claim that the Christians have a different Lord and a different governing power, Jesus Christ. In the second phrase of verse 20, Paul says, "we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." This statement had enormous political implications. Caesar Augustus was acclaimed to be the "savior of the world" because he had restored order and peace throughout Italy and in the provinces. By applying the imperial title, Savior, to Jesus, Paul was undermining the city's allegiance to Caesar. Paul redirects his readers' focus on their Savior in heaven, Jesus Christ the Lord. Their hope for the future was not on the reign of Caesar. It was on Jesus Christ, the heavenly Lord and Savior.

Even a recitation of the Lord's Prayer would have been a treasonous act. To say, "Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be Done" would have been a declaration that all hope in the future was in Christ not in Caesar. It would have meant an entire life orientation towards a future that transcended everything they saw around them. Paul is asking the Philippians to look at the world differently than their neighbors. The belief in Christ's coming kingdom would have given the Philippian believers a place to stand no matter what kind of opposition they faced. Theirs was a sure hope built on a firm knowledge of what Christ had done and what he had promised to do in the future.

## PRAYER

*Lord, as we see political chaos and disunity in our culture, remind us of how much you transcend all of that. Remind us to think about your lordship and how it should shape our thinking about the present and the future. Remind us each day that we are citizens of heaven and of what our citizenship there should mean. Thank you for giving us a sure hope that calms our fears and heightens our expectations for the future.*

-Richard Malone