

LIVING INTO THE FUTURE

BIBLE BASIS: Philippians 3:7-16

BIBLE TRUTH: The Christian faith draws us into the future, so we should be preoccupied with God's mission in Christ.

MEMORY VERSE: Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).

LESSON AIM: That your students will reflect on an attitude that was shaped by the expectation of life with Christ.

TEACHER PREPARATION

MATERIALS NEEDED: Quarterly Commentary, Adult Quarterly, Adult resources—charts, worksheets, and other teaching tools, Bibles (several different versions)

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER'S NOTES:

LESSON OVERVIEW

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

To discuss what it means to "count" something lost for Christ.

BIBLE LEARNING

To focus on Christ and move toward Christian maturity.

BIBLE APPLICATION

To better understand how we can address the many reasons why people give up because of the many problems in their lives and how we can assist others as a testimony to God's grace in our lives.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Students will reflect on what helps or hinders their focus on life with Christ.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-16

7. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

10. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his

sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11. If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

12. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

15. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

16. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Paul began this chapter with some warnings. Some false teachers were telling the Philippian believers that they could not be saved by faith alone, but had to supplement their faith with keeping certain Jewish laws and rituals. Paul taught that we experience salvation by faith alone (Acts 16:30-31; Romans 1:16; Ephesians 2:8-9). He cautioned the Philippians to be aware of persons who came teaching an added doctrine or practice to what he taught and they already believed.

TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

LIFE NEEDS FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: That your students will focus on the gains in Christ that God has blessed us to receive.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's Visit to Philippi

The plain of Philippi is bounded on all sides by mountains or hills. To the West rises Mount Pangaeus; to the East is a spur of Mount Orbelos with a conical shape. Philippi was located at the foot of this spur. In addition, the plain was bordered along the northern edge by forests and the South by a marshy area (now drained), formed because the Symbolon Hills created a too formidable barrier for waters from the nearby mountains to make their escape to the Aegean Sea.

Philippi was founded by Philip II of Macedon in 360 B.C. and replaced the former Thracian settlement of Crenides. It was significant to the Macedonian ruler as the chief center in the Pangaeus gold mines, which provided him with revenue for his gold currency, the support of his army, and the bribery of his enemies. These important mines seem to have been largely exhausted by the time Macedonia passed into Roman hands.

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: That your students will learn more about what it may be like to live in the future with Christ.

I. LOOK AT THE GAINS IN CHRIST (Philippians 3:7-9)

Persistence, keeping on keeping on, is one of the most important keys to success in any significant endeavor. Most people do not fail because of lack of intelligence, talent, or resources; but because they give up too soon.

Remember the story Jesus told of the man who failed miserably, even though his two colleagues succeeded? (Matthew 25:14ff; Luke 19:12ff) The brother didn't fail because he was less intelligent or was given less money than the other two successful brothers. He failed because he didn't try. He didn't work at his assignment. He gave up too soon.

Counting the Cost (verses 79)

7. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

Paul had just been reciting the things for which he might have spiritual pride, but then he turned around and told us that these accomplishments and titles were of no real value. We could paraphrase Paul here: "All of these assets that might have given me a superior status as a Jew, I gave up to become a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ" (verse 7). "In fact," he went on to write, "I have gladly given up all of these inferior things, so that I could develop a superior relationship with Jesus Christ, my Master. Believe me, I consider all of the pluses I possessed as a superior Jew as minuses, really just so much garbage ('dung') in comparison to what I have gained by being known and loved by Jesus Christ" (verse 8, paraphrased).

Having just listed his outstanding qualifications in verses 5 and 6, Paul in today's language might have said, "It simply is not possible to have been a better Jew than I—an immaculate birthright, Ivy League credentials, and an impeccable resume. But none of that matters at all now because of Christ." In today's jaded world, such a statement would be assumed to be hyperbole or political positioning of some kind, but Paul could not have been more sincere.

8. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

What he "counted" (Greek, hegeomai, hayg EHomahee) as a loss for Christ, which among other things can mean "considered, esteemed, deemed" or "thought of as worthy," he also actually lost or sacrificed for Christ (verse 8, "I have suffered the loss of all things"). All his extensive accomplishments, which previously had been a source of great pride, he really had left behind; they'd become meaningless to him next to Christ (Matthew 16:26).

Not only had Paul been unable to secure his own righteousness before, but also his ongoing comparison to Christ was so stark, his former zealous and credentialed pursuits were now worse than garbage by comparison. Likening his well-known and ardent observance of the Mosaic Law to "dung" (Greek, skuba lon, SKOObalon), meaning "animal excrement, dregs," or "any worthless and detestable refuse," should have driven home his point with abundant clarity to those who still (literally) followed the Law religiously. Imagine someone today sending such a blunt, probably offensive message to the best and brightest in the highest and purest of ivory towers, especially if their pedigrees were also their religion. Something that you only count as a loss may still have some value, but something that is now dung to you is valueless. Moreover, it is something disgusting, from which you want to get as far away as possible.

9. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Paul was not afraid to admit he had come up empty in his prior quest for righteousness based on human performance of the Mosaic Law. To be found in the righteousness of Christ (faith), however, as opposed to his own humanly earned righteousness (works) was Paul's new and highest goal. It is probable that in all of Israel, none other than Paul could better understand and explain the differences of these opposing types of righteousness—faith and works (II Corinthians 5:21 is another succinct example). Like many Greek words, there is not always a single English word that captures the essence. "Righteousness" (Greek, *dikaioσύνη*, *dikaioōnē*) includes many facets. An online resource Blue Letter Bible, explains: "In a broad sense: state of him who is as he ought to be, righteousness [is], the condition acceptable to God ... in a narrower sense, justice or the virtue which gives each his due." In today's words, Paul could be saying, "I tried everything I could to be 'righteous' (Greek, *dikaios*, *dikaioōs*); in the end, it was all in vain. I could not earn it no matter what I did. God alone can grant righteousness through Jesus."

QUESTION 1

What thing(s) do you count as a loss(es) for Christ (verse 7)?

(Answer) will vary; possible answers include: position in the church, job title, and car

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Focused on Christ Do you feel you have gained something excellent as a result of becoming a follower of Christ? You're not looking back at the world, wondering what you're missing and longing for your old worldly habits, friends, and activities, are you? Are things rough for you? Are your burdens heavy? Are things going

downhill? Don't dwell on the past, and don't give up. Focus on the gains you have made in your relationship with Christ.

II. TAKE THE TIME TO FOCUS ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST (Philippians 3:10-11)

Paul was well aware that it was only by the power of the risen Christ that he was given a new life, and he wanted to make the same abundantly clear for his readers. It is worth noting that Paul never failed to pair life with death, reward with suffering, and victory with sacrifice; indeed, we never surrender anything, nor do we ever labor or suffer in vain when we do it for Christ (see Mark 10:29-30; I Corinthians 15:58). In fact, our gain will be multiplied many times over our pain—just as it was for Christ.

To Know Christ (verses 10-11)

10. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

The Greek word for "know" is *ginosko* (*gino* *skō*). To *ginosko* Christ is not merely to know about Him, as in knowing facts or statistics, but includes a very personal intimacy that interacts with everything Christ did on Earth—His humility and approachableness, His love and compassion, His suffering and death, and His ultimate victory and resurrection. To *ginosko* good friends is to know what makes them tick and love them anyway; to *ginosko* Christ is to know what He did for you, to love Him in response, and to be given an inner desire to emulate the entire pattern of His life. To *ginosko* Christ is to fellowship with Him, and personally share in both His suffering and His resurrection (II Corinthians 1:5; 4:10-11; Romans 8:11).

11. If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Most commentators agree that Paul was not expressing concern about whether or not he would attain his final resurrection ("I might," KJV; "in the hope that I will," Good News Bible; "one way or another I will," NLT). Instead, it seems he simply did not know if he would be alive when Christ returned or experience resurrection simultaneously with all other believers who had passed. Another viable option is that even Paul did not assume he would end up in glory, but had so much genuine humility he would not predict his own eternal outcome no matter how confident he was about it in his heart.

QUESTION 2

Jesus was compassionate, humble, and He suffered in His death. Is it true or false that there is power in Jesus' resurrection (verse 10)?

(Answer) true

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Paul Was Not Qualified

It seems that Paul was absolutely enamored with Christ. He said in effect, "I have all these gains, but I'm not satisfied. I want to know Jesus. I want to know Him experientially, by being like Him. I want to suffer and die," not to make atonement for sin—Paul knew he could never qualify for that. But he was prepared to suffer for the cause of Christ, and fully experience the power that resurrected Jesus as well as the final goal of personal resurrection (verses 10-11). Wow, isn't that something! Isn't that profound?

III. TAKE THE TIME TO FOCUS ON THE HARMONY WITH CHRIST (Philippians 3:12-14)

Paul warned against putting confidence in the flesh or in our own efforts (Philippians 3:3). Our society drums it in us from the time we are in elementary school: 'You've got to believe in yourself.' And that's true, if you don't believe in God. After all, God has given us the gift of faith. We have to believe in something or someone. It's much better to believe in oneself than to believe in someone else who is sure to let us down or to believe in a car or some other object that television commercials try to sell. Christians are to trust God and no one else—not even themselves.

Perfection in and Pressing Toward Christ (verses 12-14)

12. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

It is conceivable that Paul was addressing an error on the part of eager new converts who shared with orthodox Jews that they could attain "instant perfection" in Christ, in a misguided attempt to stress the finality of Christ's sacrifice compared with the endless Mosaic sacrificial system. Since it is such an important part of Paul's message, a proper understanding of "perfect" is critical. In the

Greek, the verb *teleioo* (*telioo*), carries several meanings such as "to accomplish, bring to an end, consecrate, complete, or finish" (see also Acts 20:24, "so that I might finish my course with joy"). But most experts in the New Testament's original language believe the context of Philippians 3:12 indicates "maturity."

13-14. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul addressed common mistakes Christians make. Runners everywhere have one thing in common—they do not look backwards while in a race. Nothing back there is important, it is only what is ahead that matters. The past can distract in three distinct ways: (1) Everyone lives with a certain amount of shame and regret for past bad decisions, mistakes, selfish or mean acts, and so on. Paul's answer is simple: don't dwell on it, leave it where it is, keep pressing forward. (2) Past exceptional Christian service, such as a mission trip or major sacrifice, also can interfere with the present, tempting people to glide in the warm air of their own former spiritual thermals rather than continue to sacrifice and serve without ongoing recognition. (3) Prior worldly accomplishments and glories can create a false sense of importance and expectations, which conflict with Christ's model of humility and selfless service. Paul's summed advice is that every aspect of the past is redefined by the present and future in Christ: "Count every former gain as loss, and forget those things which are behind" (verse 13, paraphrased).

QUESTION 3

Paul uses athletic metaphors to describe his relationship with Christ in verses 12-14. Share a sports event or sports activity that describes your relationship with Christ.

(Answers) will vary.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

What Is My Number One Priority?

What is your number one priority in life? What takes most of your time, thought, energy, and resources? If the Lord told you to ask for anything you wanted, what would your request be? Is your highest desire to be like Jesus? Do you hear the Lord calling you to raise the level of your aspirations?

IV. TAKE TIME TO FOCUS ON CHRISTIAN MATURITY (Philippians 3:15-16)

Jesus Himself taught in numerous parables about wisdom and maturity, and extensively about kingdom principles of losing one's life in order to save it, adding on several occasions that those who have "ears to hear" need to hear His message (Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43). Here Paul echoed Jesus' teaching that those who are "perfect"—an adjective in the Greek that means "mature" (*teleios*, *telos*)—need to imitate his athletic stance or attitude of pressing hard after Christ. The word "minded" comes from the Greek *phroneo* (*fronēo*), meaning "attitude," so Paul's intention here seems to be to urge the believers to be "spiritually mature [and] agree on these things" (Philippians 3:15, NLT; see also 2:5).

Growing in Christ (verses 15-16)

15-16. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Christian maturity is the objective. Paul now switched from his personal relationship with the Lord and focused on his readers. He wrote, "This is the objective (pressing toward the mark, or seeking to do God's will) that I want all of you

to adopt—especially those of you who are (or striving to be) spiritually mature. I know all of you are not at the same level of maturity, so if you sincerely disagree with me now, don't be overly concerned. God, in His own time and in His own way, will make clear to you the attitude you should have" (verse 15, TEV, paraphrased).

Christian unity is the outcome. Now Paul returned to his "attack" on disunity, the Philippian Christians' underlying problem. In verse 16, he wrote, "Wherever you are on your spiritual journey, let's be united in the disciplined way we live (let's walk by the same rule), and disciplined by the truth we have been taught (let's mind the same thing)." In his book *Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, Dr. William Barclay suggested that in verse 16, Paul was speaking especially to a group of folk in the church who believed that once they were saved, there were no laws they had to obey. They believed that the grace of God freed them to live undisciplined lives. They were called "antinomians" (anti = without; nomi = law). They believed that once they were saved, they could sin all they wanted without being held accountable. They were convinced that somehow grace covered it all. To these persons, Paul said that the same rules or principles of Christian conduct applied to them that applied to every other Christian.

QUESTION 4

Name at least two goals that you want to accomplish as part of your Christian maturity in Christ.

Answer) will vary; some answers may include a stronger prayer life, read and know the Bible in greater depth, control my anger or forgive others.

LIGHT ON THE WORD Jesus First

If there is one rule we can and should agree on: let us make Jesus first, make heaven our goal, and like true soldiers, march on; like athletes, press on!

BIBLE APPLICATION

AIM: That your students will actively seek ways within the church to improve their lives by being prompt, completing assignments, resolving conflict, being productive, and working for the good of the community and the church.

Perhaps this poem by an unknown author best summarizes the theme of today's lesson, "Living into the Future."

Don't Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high,
And when you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit—
Rest if you must, but don't you quit. Success is
failure turned inside out—The silver tint of the
clouds of doubt, And you never can tell how
close you are, It may be near when it seems
afar; So stick to the fight when you're hardest
hit, It's when things seem worst that you
mustn't quit.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

AIM: That your students will assist in addressing the needs of persons who have given or who want to give up, such as high school dropouts or programs targeted at high school dropouts.

Find out if there is a serious high school dropout problem in your church. If there is, ask your classmates to formulate three or four practical

strategies for encouraging young people to stay in school until they finish. These strategies might include: (a) a two hour, one night a week tutoring session; (b) a one page, monthly newsletter that lists all of the students' names, grade levels, extracurricular activities, and their academic, and other achievements; (c) locating persons to make sure the church is represented at all school functions in which young people participate—sports, plays, concerts, and the like; (d) a scholarship committee; and (e) a graduation banquet to honor all students who complete their studies on all levels from elementary through graduate school.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, Bless us with the opportunities and the resources to be blessings to others. Also give us the wisdom and the courage to be mature Christians that witness through our actions and words about Jesus Christ. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

HOW TO SAY IT: Philippi. fihLIHPai.

PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY

Read Philippians 4:2-14, and study "Growing in Joy and Peace."

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

God's Love Perfected in Us (I John 4:7-12)

TUESDAY

Trust in the Lord (Jeremiah 17:7-13)

WEDNESDAY

A Place Prepared for You (John 14:14)

THURSDAY

Trust with All Your Heart (Proverbs 3:38)

FRIDAY

Breaking with the Past (Philippians 3:1b6)

SATURDAY

Our Citizenship in Heaven (Philippians 3:17-21)

SUNDAY

The Heavenly Call of God (Philippians 3:7-16)