

# Stand Firm

**Bible Background • PHILIPPIANS 3:12–4:1**

**Printed Text • PHILIPPIANS 3:12–16 | Devotional Reading • MATTHEW 25:14–29**

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: BECOME familiar with what Paul says about living as it relates to eternity with Jesus Christ; APPRECIATE that the journey of Christian living and a quest for something eternal are demanding experiences; and PLEDGE to stand firm in Jesus Christ.

## In Focus

Deshawn was confident that he'd be accepted to the Theological School of his choice. His father was the pastor of the church he grew up in so he served in ministry most of his life. He had also been the captain of his high school's Championship-winning Bible Trivia Team.

Deshawn needed a reference letter from the school counselor, but the counselor wanted to meet with Deshawn in person first.

"You have a stellar application, but I am concerned because something important is missing," the counselor said. "In your essay, I see your knowledge, achievements, and accomplishments but what about your personal relationship with God?"

"I never thought about that," said Deshawn, who had been going through life doing what his parents and leaders expected of him. "Is that really necessary?"

"Yes, it is necessary for reasons far greater than this essay, but we'll start here." The counselor said. "Now that you will be going away to college this a good time to begin developing a personal relationship with God. Writing your essay about the beginning of your journey would be a good start."

*Developing a strong relationship with Christ prepares us for the relationship we will have with Him in eternity. Paul wanted to encourage the Philippians to please our Lord in their daily lives and stay in the race.*

## Keep in Mind

"Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained,  
let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."  
(Philippians 3:16, KJV)

## Focal Verses

**KJV** **Philippians 3:12** 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 any thing 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.

### The People, Places, and Times

**Races.** To the Greeks of Paul's day, races were very important. After all, this was the culture that had invented the Olympics! Beforehand, the runner spent much time in physical fitness training. A race in those days was in a straight line. The runner followed the line and raced toward the finish line. At the conclusion of the race, the herald proclaimed the winner, and the winner stepped forward to receive the prize—a palm branch and perhaps money. The race was not just a game to the Greeks; only one man could win. In Christ, however, many will win and we hope to be in that crowd.

### Background

Before Paul was reaching out to grasp the prize, Jesus reached out to him and grasped him on the road to Damascus. All of us have different salvation stories. We can tell how God was reaching out to us and if we could see things from God's perspective, we would probably realize that He was calling out to us at many times and in many ways before we received Him as our Savior. But God's call to Paul (Saul, as he was called in those days) was quite different. First, God called out to him with a bright light and spoke directly to him. After this, Paul was blinded and was led to the city of Damascus.

For three days, Paul was in this city fasting and unable to see. When the Lord sent Ananias to pray with him, the Lord told Ananias that Paul would bring the name of Jesus before Gentiles, kings, and Jews. This was the task that Jesus had taken hold of Paul to do. Paul did not want to fail in the task that the Lord Jesus had for him. The Lord has grasped each of us for different tasks. We have different things to do at different times of our lives, but we don't want to fail to do those things that the Lord has called us to do. It's a race.

*Will we reach the goal that He has set for us?*

### At-A-Glance

1. Pressing toward the Goal (Philippians 3:12–14)
2. Putting Commitment to the Goal into Practice (vv. 15–16)

### In Depth

#### 1. Pressing toward the Goal (Philippians 3:12–14)

After warning them about placing confidence in themselves, Paul proceeded to warn the Philippians about the dangers of false perfectionism. Although Paul strived with all that he had to attain this

righteousness, he made no claim to having already achieved it. He emphatically rejected any claim to perfection. He knew from personal experience the dangers of legalism and its tendency to produce a false sense of righteousness. Apparently, some at the Philippian church had deluded themselves with the notion that they were perfect. Paul emphasized that resurrection from the dead was not the only goal ahead. Even the objective that may be achieved in this life still lay ahead. Paul was still running the race. He could not slow his pace; to do so would be like a runner stopping short of the finish line.

Paul does not consider his past achievements to be sufficient. He cannot rest on past accomplishments. The race is unfinished. He must continue to strive to fulfill the call of God that is given through Christ Jesus. Paul's goal is to attain the objective that Christ has set for him. There is a danger in looking back. A runner would surely slow down and probably trip and lose the race. If we keep on looking back at the things we have accomplished, we will slow down as we admire what we have done. Some people look back and worry about the things they did and the things they didn't do. Surely, Paul could have done that. There were Christians who had suffered greatly because of him before he came to Christ. And some of us are always trying to guess whether we have done things wrong, and the worry can surely trip us up. The antidote for that is remembering that worry is the opposite of trust. Paul gives us the answer in verse 13. We need to stop looking backward and just keep our eyes ahead, looking toward Jesus who is waiting for us at the finish line.

Though unattained, perfection is Paul's goal. Admittedly, it is an ambition that one never seems to be able to grasp. Still, Paul is willing to continue to press toward the goal. He has begun the race and is committed to finishing the course. The work he has done so far has been good, but it is not over. As determined as Paul is to finish, he has not yet completed the

race. Therefore, he cannot afford to be slack in his efforts. In the meantime, he is concerned with avoiding the illusion of having actually gotten there. Because Christ grasped or took hold of Paul, he, in turn, wanted to grab hold of the perfection, which is Christ's goal for him. Conversion in itself represents the beginning, not the completion, of the goal. Fulfilling God's will has both a beginning and a desired end, but it is a process and a lifetime achievement.

## 2. Putting Commitment to the Goal into Practice (vv. 15–16)

The King James translation of the word “perfect” in verse 15 appears to be a direct contradiction to Paul's insistence that he is not perfect. What Paul meant here was the evidence of maturity—willingness to admit shortcomings, openness to correction, and willingness to be recreated in Christ Jesus. Those who possess this attitude are those who hold true to what they have attained. The Philippians were admonished to remain true to this point of view so that they could make further progress. They must neither forget the goal nor suffer under the illusion that they have already attained it. Just as there was a danger in assuming perfection had been reached, Paul was well aware, and equally concerned, about those who treated the goal with total disregard.

## Search the Scriptures

1. Why did Paul continue to pursue the goal of perfection (Philippians 3:12)?
2. What was Paul committed to doing, even though he had not yet attained the goal (v. 13)?
3. Paul pressed toward what prize (v. 14)?
4. What was Paul's advice to perfect (mature) believers (vv. 15–16)?

## Discuss the Meaning

God once told Abraham that He is his exceeding great reward. So it is with us—Jesus, Himself, is

the prize that we are seeking. We are running the race and Jesus stands smiling at us at the finish line. Just like a child seeking to win first place in order to please his father, we are running the race to bring joy to our Lord. What things does Paul tell us runners that we should do to win the race?

### Liberating Lesson

The picture that this Scripture paints of Paul is that he is grasping with all his might. Today, we want to make it easy to follow Jesus. We want Jesus to drop all the material blessings into our laps. We certainly don't want to suffer for Him. Is this the picture we see of Paul in these verses or anywhere else in Scripture? People in other places are suffering for Jesus, but we don't always take this as seriously as we should. How can we turn around our lazy and indifferent attitudes toward our faith in Jesus Christ?

### Application for Activation

Write down on a piece of paper the things you need to do to commit your life completely to Jesus. As a reminder, post it on the refrigerator or a mirror in your bedroom.

### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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### Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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#### Sources:

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Dictionary.com. <http://dictionary.reference.com/> (accessed October 27, 2011).  
Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Philippians: Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 43. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983.  
New Testament Greek Lexicon. Bible Study Tools.com. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/> (accessed October 27, 2011).

## Say It Correctly

Apprehend. ap-ree-HEND.  
Attained. uh-TEYND.  
Whereto. hwair-TOO.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

Be Watchful  
(Matthew 24:36–44)

### TUESDAY

Be Prepared  
(Matthew 25:1–13)

### WEDNESDAY

Be Trustworthy  
(Matthew 25:14–21)

### THURSDAY

Be Compassionate  
(Matthew 25:31–40)

### FRIDAY

Be Holy  
(1 Peter 1:13–21)

### SATURDAY

Stand Firm  
(Philippians 3:17–4:1)

### SUNDAY

Hold Fast  
(Philippians 3:12–16)