



## Transcendent Joy: Learning How to Rejoice No Matter What

Message #17: **How to Win the Ultimate Prize** (Philippians 3:12-16) – March 26, 2023 - Pastor Jeff

- Paul uses three great word pictures in chapter 3 to communicate vital truths about living the Christian life.
  - The accountant analyzes the profits and losses on the balance sheet of life (v. 4-11)
  - The athlete is one who runs in such a way as to win the victory (v. 12-16)
  - The alien understands his ultimate citizenship is in heaven (v. 17-21)
- The New Testament writers used athletics to communicate important spiritual lessons on how to live the victorious life.
  - Strict training (1 Tim. 4:7). Only the spiritually fit win the prize as they strip away all the unnecessary limitations.
  - Steadfast compliance (2 Tim. 2:5). You win when you play by God's rules, not your own.
  - Self-control (1 Cor. 9:15). Winning requires a self-mastery.
  - Strenuous effort (1 Tim. 4:10; Phil 3:12, 14; Heb. 12:1). We can't afford to be lax in a race that requires a wholehearted effort.
  - Strategic aim (1 Cor. 9:26). We don't win with wild punches, but direct blows that pummels our opponent.
  - Singular focus (Heb. 12:2; Phil 3:13). We must concentrate and avoid unnecessary distractions.
- Paul loved sports and used the long-distance runner to teach us how to win the ultimate prize. He uses the word "perfect" two times in this passage (v. 12, 15) to speak of two different aspects of perfection to focus our eyes on the finish line.
  - v. 12 speaks of the practical outworking of our not-yet-perfected running of the race of faith.
  - v. 15 speaks of our positional capability as perfected runners who are running for the ultimate prize.
- Paul gives us four keys to running the race of faith to win the ultimate prize of being like Jesus Christ:
  - ① **Run the faith race with a factual assessment** (3:12a, 13a)
    - Paul appeals to all faith runners to understand their true condition and keep from thinking they have already arrived and need no improvement. There are two factors to assess in your race.
    - Assess your spiritual growth in the race. Don't allow yourself to coast or rely upon the strength of your maturity or think you've done enough (v. 12a, 13a). Maintain a holy discontent that drives you to keep developing your faith for the race (Matt. 5:6).
    - Assess your goal for the race. It is easy to become distracted by lesser pursuits, but all faith runners must be looking ahead to the finish line ("*lay hold of*" – be like Jesus Christ)
  - ② **Run the faith race with a fervent attitude** (3:12b, 14-15)
    - The mindset of a runner makes all the difference in the race. Paul shares his fervent mindset to "*press on in order to lay hold of*" of Christ (v. 12b) and "*toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (v. 14). This fervent attitude requires three things:

- An attitude that is passionately all-out to win the race. The words “*press on*” describe an energetic, aggressive spirit (1 Cor. 9:24; Heb. 12:1; 1 Tim. 6:12). We can’t give in to any temptation to stop running this race.
- An attitude that is properly aimed at the right goal for the race. The word “*lay hold*” means to apprehend or seize something after a pursuit. Christ first lays hold of us in salvation and then we spend our life running to lay hold of Him as we run to hit the tape (v. 14)
- An attitude that is properly adjusted for the race (v. 15). As positionally perfect people in Christ, we need to maintain a fervent attitude that pursues Christlikeness with maximum effort.

### ③ **Run the faith race with a focused ambition** (3:13b: “*this one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, and reaching forward to what lies ahead*”)

- Athletes know winning a race takes great concentration with no distractions and this requires two things:
- A single-minded focus (“*this one thing I do*”). The best athletes are laser focused on keeping the main thing the main thing like Jesus did (Luke 19:10).
- A stabilizing focus (“*forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead*”). We can’t run the faith race with a backwards focus that allows our past to haunt us or paralyze us. We must run the race with a forward-looking focus that is stretching with every fiber of our being to reach for the finish line (Heb. 11:24-26; 12:2; Col. 3:1; 2 Cor. 4:18)

### ④ **Run the faith race with a faithful appropriation** (3:16)

- Paul concludes his personal testimony with a strong call to stay compliant and consistent in our run to be like Christ.