

## Philippians 3:12-14

I like to draw and paint. It is one of my favorite hobbies. I often like to express my thoughts or feelings in my drawing. While my sons were small, they like cartoon pictures. I drew a few cartoon paintings for them, and I put Bible verses on the paintings to give them a memorable lesson so that they can remember God's teaching whenever they look at the paintings. One of the paintings is a picture of Micky Mouse running in a field with the Bible verse Phil. 3:13-14 written on the top. It is important to know and remember that one should have a clear focus in life to live for Christ daily. One of the major themes in Philippians covers this topic.

Book of Philippians is one of Paul's letters in the New Testament. He wrote this letter during his first imprisonment in Rome. Philippi, a major urban center in north eastern Greece, is where Paul visited while he was in his second missionary journey (Acts. 16:12). There were both Romans and Greeks in Philippi, and various religions practiced there. There are many topics covered in this book such as Paul has encouraged church members to have humility, live in unity, reject false teachings, have joy in life, and live for Christ (Phil. 1:21 & 3:7). Today, let's study the topic of living for Christ as a runner in a long-distance race.

**1) You have not obtained it or arrived at the goal (Phil. 3:12)**

Whenever you are in a race, you can't claim you have reached the finish line while you are still running on the way. You should not even think you are way ahead. Paul did a lot in his life already when he wrote this book, and he still did not claim he achieved it. There are three main points:

- a) One must clearly know the goal in everything he/she pursues. The top goal in life is live for Christ.
- b) The risk of overly accredit your accomplishment is you will lack the zeal to go forward.
- c) Having a humble view can help you to try harder. It can help you to depend more on God and not yourself.

**2) Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead (Phil. 3:13)**

There are two actions here; one is for what's behind and one is for what's going forward.

a) Forgetting

Paul didn't mean completely forget what is behind. His actual point was that one should not let one's past affects him/her going forward. You might have disappointments in the past that can discourage you. You might got hurt, sorrow, misunderstood by others, etc. But, stands up and run again. You might have successful past that can slow you going forward due to pride. Ignore your past if it affects you in any way while you are running forward.

b) Straining toward

Let's look at Paul's past. Paul has crucified Christians before which he was ashamed of. Paul also had seen God moved in mighty ways in his life. He didn't let those past failures and successes to hinder him going forward.

Straining forward means 1) don't let your pass slows you down or makes you too proud, 2) don't let things in life including evil's temptations to steer you away from the purpose and prize of your race. Paul in Galatians 5:7 told the Christians in Galatia that they are running a good race but don't get distracted.

**3) Press on toward the goal to win the prize (Phil. 3:14)**

a) Press on

Press on means pursue without breaks. All believers need to actively press forward: know God more, follow Him, and do His will. We need to be continuously keeping our eyes focus on Jesus (Heb. 12:2-4), and our acts shall bring glories to God (Matt. 5:16, I Cor. 10:31).

b) The Prize

The reward in heaven contains all kinds of crowns (Matt. 25:23, Rev. 2:10, I Cor. 9:24-25, II Tim. 4:7-8). For now, we know the best "prize" is knowing Christ. His love and our transforming way of life is the most sweet and beautiful thing. Have you recently truly experienced God? Have you had a glimpse of living in the heaven would be like? The word "heavenward" in the verse means calling from above and to look upward. Visualizing the wonderful time with God and brother and sisters in heaven is the ultimate prize. This heavenward focus helps us to strain forward.

In summary, these verses teach us how to live for Christ persistently. We need to teach this to children when they are still small, and keep reminding ourselves while we each run one's own Christian race. Keep running with a heavenward aim!