

Philippians 3:12-21

Look Up, Keep Moving Forward!

Good morning, Church.

It is great to be here with all of you today.

Here on Sunday morning, we are in a verse-by-verse study of the Book of Philippians.

We have come to Chapter 3, verses 12-21...

The title of our message is “Look Up, Keep Moving Forward!”

I read a story this week that really inspired me, and I thought it connected well to our text today.

Years ago, during the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, a marathon runner from Tanzania named John Stephen Akhwari made history.

But not because he won gold, in fact, he came in last place.

Yet he is still remembered by historians for finishing the race.

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You see, about halfway through the race, he fell after colliding with other runners.

His knee was dislocated.

His shoulder was severely injured.

The medical team told him to stop.

Most athletes would have, but John refused.

Hours after the sun went down and they handed out the medals, with a small crowd still gathered in the stadium, police sirens signaled that something incredible was happening.

A single figure was approaching, limping through the darkness in immense pain toward the finish line, blood seeping through his bandages, and that figure was John from Tanzania, determined to cross it.

Later, a reporter asked him, “Why didn’t you quit?”

He answered, “My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race. My country sent me 5,000 miles to finish it.”¹

This will be Paul’s inspiration for the reader for the rest of Chapter 3.

He will say, “Not that I have already attained... but I press on.”

Paul knew he wasn’t finished. He was not perfect.

But he refused to stand still or give up.

He was not saved merely to start the Christian life; no, he was saved to finish the race that Christ set before him.

This will be his message to the Philippian Church and to us this morning.

- Don’t stop because you stumbled.
- Don’t quit because the journey hurts.

¹ <https://www.olympics.com/ioc/news/-i-never-thought-of-stopping-marathon-man-akhwari-on-his-epic-effort-at-the-68-games>

- Don't get distracted by what is behind you or discouraged by what is around you.
- Look up – your citizenship is in heaven.
- Keep moving forward – the prize is ahead.

This is a subject that I believe is very inspiring to look at.

If we can fully grasp what Paul is saying here this morning, we will understand a powerful way to live our Christian lives.

It seems today, many Christians and Churchgoers settle for mediocracy in their walk.

This settling is unnecessary and spiritually crippling.

When you couple it with a life of compromise and sin, it can bring spiritual death even.

Some accept a life of failure, unbelief, and discontent.

Many are fine with a compromised faith here in this life, as long as they can convince themselves they will not go to hell at the end of it all.

They even accept hell on earth from their choices and lack of faith, never pressing into all that God might have for them in this life.

We will never grow in our Christian journey while striving for mediocracy.

It is necessary for us to press on, press through, press in, past this mindset of just settling, and to believe that God has great plans for our lives, so that He may be glorified in greater ways.

So, let's pray, and we get into our text.

Let's see what Paul says here, starting with verse 12. We will look at that verse alone to begin.

Verse 12...

Pressing Toward the Goal

3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Remember, we ended last time with Paul saying,

Phil 3:11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

And here, he now says, “Not that I have already attained or am already perfected.” Meaning to bring to completeness.

Paul is simply carrying on the same thought of knowing the power of His resurrection while in this life.

While waiting for it to come to an end, and leaving this temporary reality to go into his permanent and real reality, in heaven.

I heard one pastor describe moving from this life to the next like this, and I just loved the description.

You know those dreams that you have that are just so vivid, they seem so real, your heart is racing, and then you wake up... you are sweating... and you realize it was a dream... it was not real... You touch yourself... oh, now you are in reality...

Well, when a Christian dies, and we close our eyes to this life, and we wake up in the next, it will be somewhat like that...

We will wake up there, and realize, “Hey, this is my true reality... this is where I belonged all along.”

“All of that, it was like a dream.”

Really, all that we do and experience in this life is only preparation for what is to come.

Paul was sitting there in prison contemplating the fact that he might die, he was going to trial soon, and he could get the death sentence...

Remember what he said as he had that reality before him...

Phil 1:21 For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.

Paul had not attained heaven at this point, of course.

He was not attaining perfection yet.

He was still in this body, living in this life, and because of that, he was experiencing the Power of the Living God working in Him and Through Him...

So, He says, “I Press On!”

Paul’s ability to Look Up allowed him to move forward in his life!

Pressing forward that he may lay hold of all that Christ Jesus has laid hold of for him.

That is something for us to ponder and meditate on this morning.

Please don't miss this point here.

Maybe you are in a place that you don't think you can move forward anymore...

You don't know if you can take another step in life...

Understand something right now, God has so much more in store for you, more than you can ever imagine in that finite mind.

There is so much the Lord can still do, and will do... so much He desires to do in us and through us...

More than we really fully comprehend.

God told Israel in...

Hab. 1:5 Look among the nations and watch —

Be utterly astounded!

For *I will* work a work in your days

***Which* you would not believe, though it were told *you*.**

The same God who promised to move empires and armies to enact His will is desiring to act on your behalf today.

I wonder if God even laid it all before you on those TV screens this morning, “This is what I have in store for you, these are the Blessings I have ahead for you!”

Would you believe it, though it were told you?

Or would your heavy circumstances this morning cause your heart to doubt?

There is no way my family can be healed...

There is no way I could ever be freed from this addiction.

I remember saying that one...

Being so addicted to alcohol, and letting it destroy my life... I thought I could never be free of it.

In fact, as I look ahead at my life, this is so weird; if you have struggled with addiction, you might understand. Still, I would look ahead, and envision at every event, may it be my future wedding, I would see BudLight, BBQs with friends, my real friend, Budlight would be

there, I would envision, in every happy memory, me drinking... it was my great companion.

I never thought I would be free... and it created such devastation in my life...

When I came across Meth and started doing it, I thought I was healed, because I did not drink when I was on Meth... and I thought, finally, I was done with something that had created so much damage in my life.

But I traded one for the worse... and the Meth grabbed Jessica and me like nothing I had ever felt before... we became slaves to it... It ran our lives...

Until we encountered the only Power Greater than all our sin... Jesus Christ...

And He broke those chains... those demons in our lives fled in fear... and we were freed...

And maybe that is your great trial this morning, addiction...

You are saying, "I can never be free."

You can; God can do a work in your days that you would not believe is possible in Jesus Christ.

Maybe it is unforgiveness... or anger... or something else...

And the problem with some in the Church is that they sell themselves so short, or they see God so shortsighted.

They don't believe that He can do it in their life.

It is different for them, somehow... and they come up so short in what is possible with God.

They settle for a cheap existence rather than the fullness of all that God has for their lives.

We can be tempted to disqualify ourselves, and Satan does this often in his tactics against us.

He brings us to this place of believing we deserve less than all that God has intended for us.

Truth be told, there are a lot of things in all our lives that would disqualify us from being a child of God or even being used by Him for the Kingdom of God.

Most of us come to God damaged, broken, and with a lot of baggage.

This is what God's Grace is all about... this is why we come to Him in the first place!

There is nothing we have done back there that can outweigh the power of His Amazing Grace to save a Person and give them New Life.

His Forgiveness is thorough, and His cleansing is methodical.

God paid an enormous price to save us, Jesus paid the price for all our sin...

Remember what the Word of God promises us, Church...

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

He can cleanse us from ALL that wreckage behind us... all our sin and unrighteousness.

Now, I am not ignorant of the fact that there are other issues in our lives besides sin that can cause us to feel short of being used by God...

Whether it is our own thoughts... things like depression... man, the enemy really works us over at times with this one, things like anxiety and worry, bitterness even, all build up, to overload us, to a dark

place of depression. We isolate, we feel lonely, and the enemy just then tees off on us in those moments.

I never understand why Christians stay home from Church in those seasons, that is when we need this gathering the most... We need each other the most... we need to surround ourselves with people to speak truth into our lives...

In isolation, we open ourselves to schemes... we buy into his lies... we make up things in our minds that are not even real most of the time...

He takes us to real dark places... causes us to often not like the very people who are in our lives to help, that God has placed in our lives to help us...

He does not want you around them... so he will make you find things about them... that makes you not want to be around them...

And further you go into isolation and loneliness...

He cripples you... Some, and I know this personally, that this can happen right here in a Church among the people of God...

And it is devastating... the enemy can so deceive and lie, that he can get a person to the darkest of all places...

To where they are harming themselves... cutting, having thoughts of suicide...

Life gets tough at times... and it gets hard for Christians too... and if Satan can separate us from each other... from talking to one another... from being real with one another...

Keeping fake plastic smiles on our faces when deep inside we are dying...

And maybe all of us have dealt with suicide in one way or another... depression... within ourselves... or a loved one... having thoughts...

I don't ever want to minimize the dark places that a person can go, even here in the Church... we have lost dear loved ones to this...

So, there is a time to examine the pain...

The Scriptures tell us...

**Lam 3:40 Let us search out and examine our ways,
And turn back to the LORD ;**

We examine the pain with the intent not to get stuck there in that place, and to turn back to the Lord...

And of course, I don't want to leave something this deep without saying this...

Maybe this morning, you are struggling, your thoughts are a mess, maybe even in the darkest places...

Tell someone... call a Trusted Friend, Call your mom, your Dad, a brother or sister, a family member, someone you can trust with the deepest things, Call someone, at the end of the service, if you have no one in your life to talk to, that you can trust, there will be Elders and Pastors available to you...

They are those you can trust, who can pray with you... But tell someone that you are struggling, because you are not alone...

And God does have a plan for your life... tomorrow will be brighter... He will get you through... don't give up here... better days are ahead...

The message Paul is giving here in this text is all you need to hear, such healthy Biblical Truth and Counsel.

This is the very truth you need to have a breakthrough... to see through the lies of the enemy... to have victory in your Christian walk.

He is telling us to Look Up! And to Keep Moving Forward!

Press forward and Take Hold of those things that have been taken hold of for you in Christ Jesus.

We are to move forward, not be crippled by our past failures, sins, or even trauma, and enter the victory found in our relationship with Jesus.

Instead of looking backwards, the Word of God continually tells us to press forward to those incredible promises of God.

For those of you who have taken our Biblical Counseling Classes...

You know this is the entire premise of our counseling here at the Church...

We don't find it fruitful to sit and talk about the past, to dig it up, or to blame it.

When we look back, all of us will find the need for therapy and a psychiatrist... This is where medication

comes in... self-medication starts often... addiction comes many times as well... as people look back, the pain compounds...

This fallen world has done a lot of damage to all of us... There is no healing in looking back...

You cannot go forward by looking back... You will sit in endless sessions of counseling, trying to find why, and blaming, but when you look ahead... now there is the healing...

You take hold of the victory Jesus purchased for you on the Cross of Calvary...

When you see that Victory, and you start living in that Victory... it changes everything...

We start living for Him and for Others...

Jess always asks me... "Why do we need counseling at all?"

If people just looked to Jesus and started serving others... it would eliminate the need for counseling in the Church...

Maybe she is onto something...

That is a woman who that world has at multiple times, looked at her life and told her, because of what she has lived through, she needs therapy, medication, counseling, and she has found her healing in serving others.

Volunteer Pregnancy Care, Olive Crest, Other Places... They told my wife, "You are too broken."

She tried to tell them, "But Jesus has put me back together."

Even Christians couldn't believe that someone who has been through what she has been through could be fixed by Jesus...

But she was healed through serving others... she has not sat through one session of counseling in her walk...

Well, she did, but the lady, try to take her through this guided meditation, to take Jess back into her childhood and relive her trauma...

Jess opened her eyes, at 19 years old, and had enough wisdom, to tell the lady, a Christian counselor, "Why are you digging up things, Jesus has already healed in my life?"

The lady had no reply, because she was only doing what she was taught... she had no biblical grounds for it all...

We are to look ahead Church... Look to Jesus... Look to the Work He has called us too... get our eyes off ourselves... and then we will heal... Depression will flee...

Paul goes on now in verse 13...

13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, **14** I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Listen to Paul's solution here... it is so simple...

And please don't get upset with me, thinking I am minimizing your problems this morning.

Paul was a man who had immense trauma... carried immense guilt from incredible sins against the Church... Had terribly unfair things happen to him in the ministry...

If anyone could sit and look back in woe and in pity, self-loathing and depression...

It would be this man...

I don't know how many of you have had rocks thrown at you for preaching the Gospel and been left for dead?

I don't know how many of you have been beaten with rods simply for trying to do ministry... beaten with whips for doing good...

Chased by his own countrymen... Perils everywhere he went...

By the people he loved the most, the Jews, he was hated the most.

He was often abandoned by his friends, even in the Church; this is a man who knew loneliness...

He knew what it was like to be brought to the brink of wanting to quit, to be spoken to by the Lord to keep going...

And here is his teaching, you may think insensitive to your life... but he is a man who knew pain...

He says Forget it all, forget those things that are behind!

You cannot rewrite any of it!

No matter how much you rethink, no matter how many times you “what if?” the situation... it will still be there!

So Paul says, leave it behind and press forward to those things that God has already done for you and in you!

Forgetting does not mean don't you know it is there...

I am not sure that is entirely possible...

Maybe something like this...

This year was a big year for Jess and me, November 19th was our 21st Anniversary...

3 Sevens, three complete Biblical Weeks of marriage...

But there is a problem...

We have six kids... two playing soccer with practices; others have school field trips and award ceremonies; Jess had parent-teacher conferences; and Freedom's birthday is the next day.

Compound that with, it fell on a Wednesday Night, so I was teaching...

And we both forgot our anniversary this year... So, I was not a dirtbag husband... she forgot to...

We were so caught up in all that was pressing us that we forgot...

Maybe, this is all that Paul is saying here: we cannot ever entirely leave those memories behind, all those experiences, they will all be there...

But we can look ahead, and get so caught up and consumed in all that Jesus has done for us, and the New Life He has given us, and look to the work He has put before us... Those things behind us get smaller and smaller.

They will not be our focus any longer... the Great Work of Saving Souls will be our new focus...

Eph. 2:8 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

When you realize this, it is life-changing...

When a person takes their eyes off themselves, their problems, and their woes, and starts looking ahead to the calling that God has placed on their life...

Oh, that is a revelation that makes hell tremble...

If you are a Christian here this morning, God has a calling on your life.

There is work to be done... Satan knows this... and his only way to stop what God wants to do in your life is to get your eyes on yourself continually.

If you can break free of that... and look to those works that God has prepared for you to accomplish beforehand...

Because He is always at work, all around you, and you are welcome to join Him at any time...

Satan will use fear, insecurity, prejudice, selfishness and pride to keep you immobile.

But Revival is only one step away from you... it is waiting right there in obedience... in stepping past ourselves... into uncomfortable places and into the unknown...

I tell the staff here all the time... if two roads are before you, one comfortable and easy, one difficult, requiring faith, a little dangerous... the hard path is usually the right path...

Paul likens it here to something like Olympic Running... Pressing toward the goal of a prize...

This is not an easy path... something that will strain... be hard...

He said this in...

1 Cor. 9:24-27 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it*. **25** And everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown*. **26** Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. **27** But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

We run, not for a temporal wreath here on earth, but for rewards with eternal value.

We press ahead, living our life with the perspective of the Olympic Runner, and we press through the finish line when this life is over.

This is how we should be running our Christian race...

Not coasting in our recliner chairs... but pressing through the tape right into eternity with our God...

Many are content with a lackadaisical jog... or even sitting on a bench...

But the Church wants to be entertained today.

We need to be running to win Church...

Disciplining our Bodies to press on... Even if we do fall in the race... even if winning is out of the picture... at least we can finish... coming in limping with bloody bandages...

Coasting, sitting still, looking back, are all causes of defeat...

If you are lacking Joy in your journey... understand something, it is found in pressing in...

Pursue Him with everything in you.

Strive to Grow and Serve Others...

That is where Paul is taking the reader...

Verse 15...

15 Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. **16** Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

Paul writes here that the mature believer will have this understanding: if we are seeking God, He will be faithful to reveal this Truth to us.

We will grow and mature spiritually by Looking Up and keeping ourselves moving forward toward those things that are of God.

And when we do this collectively, as the Body of Christ, there is Unity.

When we all desire maturity, and we all endeavor to press in to what the Lord has for us, it gets us past ourselves, and we are better able to serve others.

Maturity is a necessity here...

But how do we mature? Look, what Paul says next, starting in verse 17...

Our Citizenship in Heaven

17 Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. **18** For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: **19** whose end *is* destruction, whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame — who set their mind on earthly things.

Now, Paul is laying out some fundamental truths here for our Christian race.

This is very crucial to understand if we are to mature in our faith...

The people we choose to run this race with will either make us or break us spiritually.

The people we bring into our innermost trusted places, into our closest fellowship with, the ones we seek counsel from, and advice from in this, will either lift us or bring us down.

Think of those most intimate relationships you have, the people you trust the most... are they healthy or toxic?

My wife is my most trusted... she has been with me at my worst, knows me, and is really the only one who truly has all of me...

Keep your most intimate relationships small...

Especially be careful of having a non-believer influence your life's decisions.

I remember early on in our marriage... we started in a rough patch... so it is hard to say which one we were in... but it was rough... and we were not even a year in...

And Jess still had some of her non-Christian friends around, although they were disappearing fast...

But there was one that lived out by us in Arizona, who had just gone through a divorce...

Jess and I had just gotten in a huge fight... And she talked to that unbelieving friend... a friend who apparently had been through a lot of hard life with Jess when they were little...

And she was bitterly going through her divorce, so her advice to Jess was, "You don't need that man, come live with me, we can start a life together, live together like when we were little."

So Jess told me, "In the morning, I am going to leave to go stay with her for a while."

I went to work... Then I came home... to my surprise, Jess was there, making dinner in our little apartment...

We sat down to eat, and I asked her what happened...

Well, turns out, she called her other friend, Nicki, who is still her best friend to this day, our pastor's daughter, and Nicki gave Jess godly advice... and prayed with her...

I told our Elder Steve Soto that story a few weeks ago, and as I said it to him, I realized in that moment that it was the only time Jessica ever asked an unbeliever for marriage advice...

She never even talked to that friend again...

And she was 18 years old at the time, and could understand that there were two different people she could surround herself with in her new walk with Jesus.

There were always going to be toxic people who would be there to try to tear her life apart, to take her away from God's will for her life, and although she loved those people, they were too dangerous to allow into her life.

But there were others in her life that would speak truth to her, even when she did not want to hear it,

and they would stand with her in that truth, pray with her in that truth, not just tell her to do something, but get shoulder to shoulder in all the hard of doing what was required.

Those are the people worth letting into your life...

Those who will love you at a high cost... who don't keep a distance... they are not just there with all their words and ego... but willing to roll up their sleeves and get into it with you...

Even in the Church... Paul is saying there are people you don't want to open your heart up to.

I have learned this... the preachy people who like to tell people what to do, but are not willing to do anything to help them at all, I tune them out, I encourage you to tune them out.

Look what Paul says here, "Follow my example."

He wrote in **1 Cor. 11:1** *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

These are the kind of people we need in our lives... whose lives are lived out... not just in word... but in deed...

Paul tells them, weeping here, there are many fakes and enemies out there, whose God is pleasure in this life, whose mind is on this world.

The people whom you open up to and trust, who you allow to mentor you, make sure they are focused on heavenly things, and they have a genuine love for Jesus.

Make sure they are pointing you to Jesus... Not to a program, religious exercise, some philosophy, or even themselves... but to the only solution, Jesus Christ.

It is so vital that the people who are influencing your life are godly and heavenly-minded...

We are warned

1 Cor. 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."

You are greatly deceived this morning if you think the crowd you are running with will not impact your life at all.

Peer pressure is not just a thing for adolescents.

We can get sucked into it as well.

I liked the Daily Manna yesterday...

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man brings a snare,
But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.

The world, and the pressure it puts on us, will bring us down...

We need to surround ourselves with mature believers who will point us heavenward.

We were designed to need fellowship with one another.

We are no good alone; we need each other for spiritual growth.

Heb. 10:24-25 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, **25** not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

We are to stir up love and good works, as we gather together, waiting for the Lord's return, Church...

This keeps us from focusing on the past and keeps us pressing forward...

Look around... You need these people... I need you... God has us in each other's lives to grow and stir one another toward love and good works till He returns.

If you are around the worldly-minded crowd... this world will be your primary focus... and you will eventually be weighed down by it...

We are not supposed to be looking there at all... look what Paul says... as we end this Chapter starting in verse 20...

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Look at this, we Look Up, Press Forward to the Upward Call, because our True Citizenship is in heaven.

We are really aliens and strangers here, and we belong to another world altogether.

We are just passing through now, our eyes are fixed homeward.

Every time I am overseas, on a trip, toward the end of the journey, my heart starts heading home, my compass is one direction, my own bed, next to my wife, in the chaos with all the kids...

I might even miss the dogs, a little... but not too much...

But I am ready...

This is how we as Christians are to live in this world...

Just longing to be with Jesus... in our new heavenly Home, the one He promised He was going to prepare for us.

This causes us to live differently... faithfully even, to our God, because we know our reward awaits, as we come closer and closer to that finish line.

We need to keep running Church, pressing into all that God has for us...

Forgetting all that is behind, that would distract, bring down, set us back, and press forward with heaven in our sights.

What a joy it will be to hear those infamous words.

Matt 25:23 “Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”
If you are a believer this morning...

The instruction is explicit... Look Up, Keep Moving Forward...

Lay Hold of all that Jesus has for you.

Remember your enemy wants you to look back, to focus on your failure, sin, and all that trauma this world has dealt upon you, to keep you ineffective in the work... bogged down in gloom...

Press ahead, Christian... run that race... the finish line is ahead...

Maybe this morning, you are coming in tired; you are nowhere near winning the race you are in.

You are depressed, you have been looking back, you are in darkness...

Picture One #1 Coming in Tired

You look like John, the stadium is almost cleared out, you are lonely...

Please don't give up... finish it out... You did not make it all this way to give up...

This morning, get prayer... ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh, to equip you to carry on... to change your focus to a heavenly vision...

Jesus is worth it; the Work is Worth it. We need some grit, yes, but His Spirit is here to help in our weakness.

When we persevere, we mature, and God uses us to inspire and spur others on in their faith.

Heaven is our finish line, there is work to do until then...

Let's finish well... Amen?

If you are not a Christian today... You can jump in the Race with us today... join in the work... it all starts with the washing...

Come to Jesus and let Him wash you, as you repent of your sins...

Let's pray...