

# Philippians 3

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Date: 25 August 2013

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[ 0 : 00 ] It will be helpful if you can keep your Bible open to Philippians chapter 3.

And for many of those who have watched long distance running before, you know that the winner is only decided when he or she crosses the finishing line.

Well, you know that picking the winner right from the start is never going to be a straightforward answer. The competitors that you know may not actually win it no matter how impressive his past record may be.

Many of those who start the race well, but then as you watch the race, you'll find that there's going to be lots of twists and turns before the winner finally emerges in the end.

The picture of an athlete participating in the race is what the Apostle Paul was trying to bring across to the Philippian Christians. In today's passage, he used the metaphor of a race to describe to the Philippines living up a Christian life.

[ 1 : 33 ] So how does he explain it? First of all, he describes about the race itself, verse 10 to 11. Secondly, he warns about the obstacles to avoid, verse 12 to 13.

And finally, he highlights the motivation to finish the race, verse 14. Paul started off by saying, the Christian life is all about race.

If you were to look with me together from verse 10 to 14, you may have realised that the words athlete or race are not mentioned explicitly in these few verses.

But, there are many other words that describe it very clearly. Notice how the words pressing on, straining forward, go and price keep appearing in these verses.

If you look carefully again in verse 10, take note of the number of times the word may appear in these sentences. It's quite clear over here that Paul is not talking about something that he had done in the past, but something that he is still doing in the present.

[ 2 : 57 ] What we call purpose is to describe the Christian life as an athlete running in the race. That the obvious question will come to your mind. What is the race about?

You do not have to look far to verse 10 and 11 to find your answer. Let me read it out for you. Verse 10. Yes, the race is all about knowing Christ.

But hang on, wait a minute. Does not Paul already know Christ by this stage? I think it is important for me to clarify that Paul is not talking about the fact that he is not safe.

After all, he has already mentioned in verse 12 and 13 that he is safe in the hands of the Lord. And looking further back in verse 9, Paul also speaks about how he is safe in Christ.

It is the only reason why he has found right with God. You see, the reason why Paul would describe Christian life as a race is because knowing Christ does not stop at the beginning of your Christian life.

[ 4 : 31 ] Many of you who are married here will know that your marriage does not end on the day of your wedding. You can't say that you know your wife completely because you have just married her.

You know that it is just the beginning of an exciting journey for you. You will look forward to the rest of the marriage because you want to draw near to her.

You want to get to know her better. How do you know Christ better? You may ask. Does it mean that you just need to read the Bible more to find out more about him? If you look with me to verse 10 again, you will look at verse 10 again. If you look with me to verse 10 again, you will look at the Bible and see how you are a Christian. You will look at the Bible and see how you are a Christian. It is very similar to that in the marriage. Because we are united to Christ.

We want to pursue Him. We want to draw near to Him. And we want to know Him better. How do you know Christ better? You may ask. Does it mean that you just need to read the Bible more to

find out more about Him? If you look with me to verse 10 again, you will find that knowing Christ means we share in His suffering.

We become like Him in His death. In other words, Paul is saying over here that if you want to know Christ, you do not only understand Him through His words.

[ 5 : 51 ] You need to follow the pattern of the life that He lives. For many of the married or attached men over here, if you were to remember your courtship days, one of the things you always try to impress your other half is to develop the liking for the hobbies that she likes.

For example, your wife or your girlfriend will like arts. And therefore, she enjoys going to the arts, I mean she enjoys going to the museum or enjoy going to the arts gallery.

Those activities may not be something that you like to do. But because your other half likes it, and because you love her, you will naturally find that over time, you gradually start to appreciate, you gradually start to develop an interest in going to the museum and going to the art gallery.

This is exactly what Paul is saying over here. If you were to flip back across to chapter 2, Paul told the Philippians that because they have been united with Christ, they would like to follow his example.

His example of humility, his example of obedience, and his example of self-sacrificial love. They would want to follow the way of the cross that Jesus, he himself, had gone through.

[ 7 : 24 ] Paul left the Philippians with no doubt that this is the same pattern of life for any of the followers of Jesus, including Paul himself.

There is no exception. This is why when Paul wrote this letter to the Philippines, he was in the prison cell. That is the reason why Paul was ready to give up his life for the Gospel.

That is the reason why, if you were to read through the last half of chapter 2, Paul mentioned that many of his co-workers, like Timothy, were willing to labor on, they were willing to suffer, and they were willing to risk their life for the work of the Gospel.

They were doing this purely because they wanted to know Christ. They want to share in his sufferings. Well, obviously a common question will come to your mind right now.

So what does it mean for you and me to share in his sufferings? I am sure many of you here will know about Mo Farah.

[ 8 : 33 ] Who can forget the pride and the sheer joy he has brought to the whole British nation when he won the 10,000-meter Olympic champion last year?

You know when I recently started to read about the keys to his achievement, there are only two words that summarizes his rise to the top.

Hard work and drafting. I remember coming across an article where one of his college coaches, in his earlier days, encouraged him to change his lifestyle, encouraged him to train his training methods, by living with a group of 10-year athletes.

Now as some of you are aware, 10-year produce lots of world-class athletes. And one of the reasons why 10-year runners are so successful, is because they are so humble, and because they are so hardworking.

And what they do is to run, they sleep, and they train all the time. I think this is exactly the same image of how Paul would describe a Christian life to the Philippines, and similarly to us over here.

[ 9 : 56 ] A Christian life is a race. It is not a bed of roses. This is because Paul knows it is a hard and difficult journey. It is a journey that requires lots of self-sacrifice.

A journey that requires lots of hard work. And a journey that may even cost your very own life. Well, it is hard and difficult, isn't it?

You may tell me, Andrew, I am no superman like Paul or the Apostles. How can I keep pressing on? This is actually a very good question.

Because if you look again, you need to verse 10. The answer lies in knowing the power of Christ's resurrection. Notice the surprise in the order of this powerful sentence that Paul is describing here, compared to what we expect.

But many of you over here would know from the Bible knowledge that Christ first died on the cross, and then subsequently raised from the dead.

[ 11 : 06 ] But here we see that Paul reversed the order to describe the state about a Christian life. The question is, why does he do that?

That's because Paul knows we need the power of Christ's resurrection to walk the way of the cross. That's why he says in verse 12 and 13 that he did not consider he has made it his own race.

It is the Lord Jesus himself who did it for him through the power of his resurrection. The race is tough, the race is demanding. It is impossible to do it on his own effort.

But the wonderful news is that Christ is already at work and will continue to work in us.

But for some of you over here who have not given your life to follow Jesus, let me say that there is no point for you to talk anything about the race at all. Because we have not even known Jesus yet.

[12:15] So let me encourage you, let me plead with you to give yourself a chance to know this Jesus who is so wonderful and so worthwhile to pursue.

But for the majority of you over here who have already started your Christian life, let me say that there are two dangers that we can find ourselves falling into.

I think the first danger is that we can fall into a delusion that we will have an easy life after we become a Christian. Where the reality could not be further away from this.

I know many of us over here who have not experienced persecution and sufferings like what many of our brothers and sisters have gone through in Syria, Nigeria or even Egypt.

But we know on the other hand, the ordinary life itself is not like a gate of roses. It is never steel, it is never plain sailing.

[13:22] The jobs that we face each day are either too mundane or too many dead lives. We have difficult bosses and colleagues that we have to deal with in our workplace.

We have mortgages or renters to pay each month. We face struggles in parenting our kids. We are not doing enough to please and communicate with our spouses.

We struggle with contentment. We struggle with relationship issues. Our daily devotion times seem like a chore. And coming to church, coming to house group meeting, coming to prayer meeting, fulfilling my greetings and hospitality duties.

WOW! It just feels so tiring. It just feels so overwhelming. Dear friends, I've got an encouraging news for you.

If this is what you are experiencing today, let me welcome you to the Christian life. The solution is not to give up on what you are doing, but to keep enduring those struggles, to bear with the feelings of those around you, and to exercise tolerance with the imperfection of others.

[14:43] This is what it means to follow the example of Christ. This is what it means to press on in your Christian life. There is also a second danger, the second danger we can easily fall into, is to think that we can do it all by our own effort.

And the trouble is, when the journey gets tough, you'll find that you simply cannot carry on any longer. Well, a couple of years back in Singapore, I went through a brief period of depression because of some health-related issues.

I went through some trying and difficult times of going through scanning tests, one after another, I had to go through a few years without any issues or problems being identified.

I think it was only then that I realised that I made a mistake. A mistake of thinking that the solution to my health problem was to keep going for one test after another.

I have forgotten to draw on the power of Jesus' resurrection to help me to press on, whether in good health or not so good health. Most of you who have participated in the marathon, who probably have realised that not all the people who start the race actually end up in the finishing line.

[16:13] Those people usually give up midway through the race due to one reason or another. Some as you have observed, give up because physically they don't just feel right.

But some others, as you may have discovered later, just stop running because they are either distracted by the things that they see around them or simply because they are caught up in a conversation with a friend that they have not seen for a long while.

I see that the Apostle warns the Philippines and similarly to us, the obstacles that may prevent us from following Jesus to the end. Look at me down to verse 12.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

If you look at this verse, Paul is telling the Philippines about the obstacles that may prevent him from pressing on in the Gospel. Notice the first obstacle he mentions here.

[17:25] It is the danger of thinking he is already there when he is not. Now the question is, why does Paul want to share about this concern of his to the Philippines?

As Paul wrote this letter to the Philippines, he knows that the Philippines themselves are in great danger. Great danger of being led astray by wrong teachings and therefore not standing firm in the

Gospel.

Notice how in verse 2 of the same chapter, Paul is warning the Philippine Christians to watch out for those false teachers. Apparently the false teachers have been saying to the Philippine Christians, It is good and well that you come to faith in Christ, but unless you are circumcised according to the Jewish laws, you do not really belong to him.

Paul solved a serious problem that comes with this teaching. Because the false teachers have turned from Christ and put their confidence in their religious activities.

They have stopped running the race. They thought they had arrived. They were setting their minds on earthly things because they thought that their citizenship is over here.

[ 18 : 44 ] There was no longer any need for them to go the way of the cross. I recently went on a two-week trip to France with a couple of my friends from my home church back in Singapore.

As part of the trip preparation, I can assign a task. The task of booking for the train tickets and accommodation. I would like to think that I did a relatively good job of doing the two things above, especially given the short amount of time that I have.

However, as I got on the trip, I realized I have a problem. The problem was that I have forgotten an important task on planning how to travel from the train station to the place of accommodation.

You see, I know most of the places I have looked is very close to the train station. But the problem is that little do I know, when we arrived there, I have to start panicking on how to work my way to the apartments on the train stations.

You see, the mistake I made earlier was to think that we have arrived once we are at the train stations. But the truth is that it is the apartment, not the train station where my destination should be.

[ 20 : 14 ] So if the first obstacle is to think that we have already finished the race, the second obstacle that Paul warned the Philippines from running the race is the danger of being distracted by the past.

Look down with me to verse 13. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward what lies ahead.

Well, what we see here is a picture of an athlete, not constantly looking back from where he came from. But notice over here, Paul is not describing what he had witnessed at the cross-country race. It is something that he has experienced before. If you look back to verses 4-6, Paul actually listed up all his past privileges.

Paul listed up his past achievements. Not because he wants to boast that his CV is much better than the false stitches. But because he wants to show to the Philippine Christians that these are all rubbish.

[ 21 : 26 ] They contribute nothing to his salvation. That's why coming back to the passage here in verse 13, Paul is able to say that he is able to forget what is behind.

He is able to strain forward what is ahead. It is important to take note that forget here does not mean not being able to remember or record.

When the Bible talks about forgetfulness, it talks about the fact that we no longer take into account of where we came from or what we have achieved before.

It is like an athlete not taking into account whether he has a favourite tab or underdog tab before he starts the race. You see, Paul was deeply concerned about the dangers facing the Philippine Christians.

He was worried that they were no longer striving for the gospel. They were in danger of turning from Christ to their past religious background and past religious activities.

[ 22 : 32 ] Thinking that this is the way that will keep them right with God. But Paul says over here that this is also the way that stops them from running the race.

Turning back means they want to stop their gospel ministry. Turning back means they want to stop following Christ. Why I think this passage has similar warnings for us over here in the 21st century. The dangers of thinking that we have arrived, of trusting in who we are or in what we have done, these are things that are still very real in our circles today.

Some of us pride ourselves in our Christian upbringing. We boast about our regular attendance in church. We boast about the fact that it belongs to a good Bible teaching church like IPC.

We also boast about the number of ministries we are actively involved in. We boast about the number of ministries we are actively involved in. You see, let me clarify myself.

[ 23 : 39 ] Those things are not wrong to yourself. They are good things. And something that we should be thankful for. But the problem starts when we begin to think that we have done enough.

We start to look back to what we have achieved in the past. We want to take it easy. And therefore we want to avoid the hard work of following Christ.

I believe one of the key reasons why many of us sometimes fall into this trap. It is because we have turned our eyes from pursuing Christ to pursuing other earthly things.

We would like to think that we can now have a free ride all the way through. We can fall into a temptation that we can continue to live like the rest of the people around us, without the need to keep following Christ.

For example, we think that we should pursue our education in the best colleges and universities. We must strive for excellent progress in our career path. We must make lots of money.

[ 24 : 51 ] We must live in a good house. We must aim for a good quality of life and an early retirement. You see, the priority of following Christ has been replaced by the pursuit of comfort and riches in this world.

All because we think that we are already there. All because we think we have done enough as a Christian. Where does this leave us?

If the goal of knowing Christ means that we are to share in His sufferings, if knowing Christ means that we have to be mindful of the threat of obstacles, surely the million dollar question is, is it worth it?

Notice in verse 14, that Paul's focus is not on his past background or achievements, but on the future Christ.

His aim, his goal is to finish the race. You see, there is no motivation or incentive for Paul to give all that he has to run this hard race, if there is nothing that awaits him at the end.

[ 26 : 06 ] Paul wants to keep running because he knows the surprise that awaits him at the finishing line. Well, what is the surprise that awaits us?

Can we know anything about the price from the passage? We mentioned earlier, back in verse 10, that Paul's purpose of running the race is to know Christ.

But you see, there is no way that he can know Christ fully until he reaches the finishing line. That's the reason why Paul mentioned in verse 12, he is not there yet.

But the day will come, the day will come, when he will be perfect. Paul also mentioned in verse 11, about attaining the resurrection from the dead.

Although Paul has experienced the power of his resurrection, when he becomes a Christian, deep in his heart, he knows that this is just a foretaste of a better thing that is to come.

[ 27 : 10 ] A future resurrection that will arrive. And he is very certain that this will be the price that will await him. Even though right now, he does not know how he will end up there.

Finally, Paul knows in verse 14, that this price is about entering heaven. Notice on the passage, notice on the verse itself. It's all about looking forward to God calling us up to enter into this place with him.

What is the price that you are aiming for in your life today? I would like to clarify at this point, that this price is very different from an Olympic race.

When you can't be sure that you win the price unless you are among the best runners. It's therefore important to realize that it is not our running that earns the price.

You only have to run to receive the price. If you are not yet a Christian, just in case you are working through your mind, you are figuring out how to obtain this price.

[ 28 : 22 ] Let me say, let me tell you, you don't have to run to earn this price. The price is already offered to us as a gift by Jesus, whom he paid for with his very own life.

Can I invite you to receive this wonderful gift that Jesus is offering to you today? For the rest of you, some of you have already been counting the cost of being a Christian.

You may be looking over the shoulders of your friends and your peers beside you. They are staying in big houses, they are driving big cars, they are living an attractive lifestyle, they are having a successful career.

You may be thinking right now, should I cut back on my ministry involvement? Should I join a bigger church, never mind whether they teach the Bible properly, so that I can just be a Sunday Christian?

Maybe, maybe then I can divert my time and energy to start pursuing the things my peers have been doing. Dear friends, think through it again.

[ 29 : 34 ] Isn't it wonderful to know the certainty of the price that awaits you at the end? Surely it makes all the hard work worthwhile. Surely it has to give you the motivation to keep pressing on.

In conclusion, I remember back in my university days in Australia, there are a lot of friends around me that I look up to. They were faithful, they were committed Christians then.

They were serving actively as fiber-sized leaders in the university fellowship group. They were doing lots of evangelism, doing lots of discipleship ministries.

However, the sad reality is that when I catch up with them much later, they were no longer attending church. Their focus and their drive are centred entirely in the state, around their career, around their possessions, and around their lifestyle.

Some twisted away because they got themselves involved in non-Christian relationships. You see, they are no longer interested in running the Christian race, because they think they have already arrived.

[ 30 : 52 ] They want to move on to other things, because their focus is no longer on the Christ in heaven, but more on the things on this earth. Dear friends, let this passage remind us that we are in for a long haul.

Our goal in life is about knowing Christ. It's about sharing in His suffering. Beware of falling back on your past achievements, or to think that we have already arrived.

It may be a path with a head, but take heart, it is worth it, because of the Christ that awaits us in the end.

Shall we pray? Heavenly Father, we want to ask for forgiveness for the times that we have acted, and behave as if our Christian life has already stopped.

We want to thank you for showing us this evening that our Christian life is a journey. It is a journey that is exciting and wonderful, because we have known the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we know that this journey is not easy, but we are encouraged from today's passage that we can follow the footsteps of our Lord Jesus.

[ 32 : 22 ] We thank you that although He was rich, yet for our sake, He became poor for us by walking the way of the cross. Dear Father, we want to pray that you will help us to see that it is such a wonderful privilege to share in the suffering of Christ.

May we press on in our journey ahead, and keep looking forward to the day where we can see you face to face again, where we are waiting to receive the prize from you.

We pray all this in Jesus' name.