

If you could go back and give your younger self one piece of spiritual advice, what would it be and why?

Paul admits he hasn't 'arrived' spiritually despite his deep relationship with Christ. How does this honest vulnerability challenge our own expectations of spiritual maturity?

What does it mean practically to 'press on' in your faith when life's demands and distractions constantly pull your attention away from eternal things?

How can we celebrate spiritual progress in our lives without falling into the trap of measuring our worth by performance or perfection?

In what ways does isolating our faith and trying to run the race alone rob us of the joy and strength that comes from community?

Paul describes people whose 'god is their stomach' and whose 'mind is set on earthly things.' What modern equivalents do you see of this kind of living, and how do we guard against it?

What does it look like for spiritually mature believers to take responsibility for nurturing and encouraging those who are younger in the faith?

How does keeping our citizenship in heaven and our eyes on eternity change the way we respond to tragedy, loss, and the fragility of life?

Are there areas in your life where you've been looking backward at past failures or regrets instead of pressing forward toward Christ?

What specific practices or disciplines help you maintain an eternal perspective when the urgent demands of daily life threaten to consume your focus?

Small Group Guide: Joy in the Journey

****Philippians 3:10-21****

Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by asking God to open hearts and minds to His Word, and to help each person apply the truths discussed to their daily walk with Christ.

Icebreaker Question

If you could go back in time and give your younger self one piece of advice about life, what would it be and why?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. ****The Christian life is not about perfection; it's about progress****

- Paul admits he hasn't "arrived" yet, but he presses on
- Joy comes from moving forward in faith, not achieving flawlessness
- We celebrate progress over years, not perfection in weeks

2. ****Joy grows when we press on together****

- Faith is meant to be lived in community, not isolation
- Mature believers have a responsibility to encourage those behind them
- The goal is to finish faithfully, not finish first

3. ****Joy endures when we fix our eyes on heaven****

- Our citizenship is in heaven

- This world is not our home
- The prize (eternity with Christ and our resurrected bodies) is worth the race

Discussion Questions

Section 1: Progress Over Perfection

1. **Read Philippians 3:10-14.** What does it mean to you that even the Apostle Paul admitted he hadn't "arrived" yet? How does this give you permission to be honest about your own spiritual journey?
2. Paul uses the imagery of a runner "pressing on" toward the finish line. In what areas of your spiritual life do you feel like you're making progress? Where do you feel stuck?
3. The sermon mentioned that "we often overemphasize what God has done in a few weeks but underappreciate what God has done in a few years." Take a moment to reflect: How has God brought you forward in your faith over the past 2-3 years?
4. What are some "past regrets" or "personal grudges" that might be keeping you looking backward instead of forward? How can the group pray for you in releasing these?

Section 2: Running Together

5. **Read Philippians 3:15-17 and Hebrews 10:24-25.** Why do you think God designed the Christian life to be lived in community rather than in isolation?

6. The sermon described different stages of spiritual maturity: babies, children, young adults, and parents. Where would you honestly place yourself on this journey? What would help you grow to the next stage?

7. Who has been a spiritual "pace-setter" in your life—someone who has encouraged you to keep running the race of faith? How can you be that person for someone else?

8. What does it practically look like to "spur one another on" in our daily lives? Share specific examples of how this group or church family has encouraged your faith.

Section 3: Eyes on Heaven

9. **Read Philippians 3:18-21.** Paul warns about those who "live as enemies of the cross." What are some modern-day examples of living with "minds set on earthly things"? How can we guard against this in our own lives?

10. The sermon referenced the tragic UPS flight crash as a reminder of life's fragility. How does keeping an eternal perspective change the way we face tragedy, loss, or uncertainty?

11. Paul promises that Christ "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." How does this promise of resurrection and eternal life with Christ motivate you to keep running your race?

12. For someone who might be struggling with doubt or wondering if the race is worth it, what encouragement would you offer from this passage?

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge:

Choose one (or more) of the following to put into practice this week:

1. Progress Check-In

- Set aside 30 minutes for honest self-reflection
- Journal about where you've grown spiritually in the past year
- Thank God for specific areas of progress
- Identify one area where you want to "press on" more intentionally

2. Encourage a Fellow Runner

- Identify someone in your church or small group who might be struggling
- Reach out with a text, call, or coffee invitation
- Share a specific way you've seen them grow in their faith
- Pray with them about their journey

3. Eternal Perspective Reset

- Each morning this week, read Philippians 3:20-21 as a reminder of your true citizenship
- When facing challenges, ask yourself: "How does eternity change my perspective on this?"
- Share with one person this week about the hope you have in Christ

4. Memorize Scripture

- Commit Philippians 3:13-14 to memory this week
- Write it on a notecard and place it where you'll see it daily

- Recite it when you're tempted to give up or look backward

Prayer Time

Guided Prayer Focus:

- **Confession:** Admit areas where we've been focused on perfection rather than progress, or where we've been running the race alone
- **Thanksgiving:** Thank God for the progress He's made in each person's life and for the community of believers
- **Intercession:** Pray for those who are struggling to keep running, those who have wandered from the faith, and those who don't yet know Christ
- **Petition:** Ask God for strength to press on, for eternal perspective, and for joy in the journey

Close by praying together: "Father, help us not to grow weary in running this race. Strengthen our faith that our eyes won't be distracted from You. Help us persevere and endure together. In Jesus' name, Amen."

For Next Week

- Read Philippians 4:1-9
- Reflect on this question: What does it mean to "rejoice in the Lord always"—even in difficult circumstances?

- Come prepared to share one thing God taught you through this week's application

Leader Notes

- Be sensitive to group members who may be in different stages of spiritual maturity
- Create a safe space for honest vulnerability about struggles and setbacks
- Celebrate testimonies of progress, no matter how small
- If someone shares about not being sure of their salvation, be prepared to walk them through the gospel and offer to connect them with a pastor or elder
- The UPS flight crash reference may be particularly emotional for some—allow space for grief while pointing to hope in Christ

5-Day Devotional: Pressing On Toward the Prize

Day 1: The Power of Progress Over Perfection

****Reading:**** Philippians 3:10-14

****Devotional:****

Paul's honest confession—"not that I have already obtained all this"—is liberating. The apostle who wrote much of the New Testament admits he hasn't arrived yet. This gives us permission to stop pretending we have it all figured out. The Christian life isn't about flawless performance; it's about faithful pursuit. Today, take an honest spiritual assessment. Where have you grown in the past year? What progress has God brought you through? Don't measure yourself against perfection, but celebrate the steps forward you've taken. Joy comes not from arriving, but from the journey of knowing Christ more deeply each day. What one area of spiritual growth can you focus on this week?

Day 2: Forgetting What Lies Behind

****Reading:**** Isaiah 43:16-19; Philippians 3:13-14

****Devotional:****

"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead"—these words challenge our tendency to live in the rearview mirror. Past regrets, failures, and even successes can anchor us when God wants us moving forward. Isaiah reminds us that God is "doing a new thing." Are you stuck replaying yesterday's mistakes or mourning how things used to be? The race ahead requires our full attention. Like a runner leaning toward the finish line, we must fix our eyes on Christ and the future He has for us. Today, identify one past burden you're carrying and intentionally release it to God. Write it down, pray over it, and choose to press forward into what God has next.

Day 3: Running Together in Community

****Reading:**** Hebrews 10:24-25; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

****Devotional:****

No runner completes a marathon without encouragement along the way. Paul shifts from "I press on" to "let us live up" because spiritual growth happens best in community. The church isn't just an event to attend; it's a family that runs together. We need spiritual parents to guide us, fellow runners to pace with us, and newer believers to encourage behind us. Who in your faith community is spurring you on toward love and good deeds? Who might need your encouragement today? The beauty of the body of Christ is that we're at different stages, yet running the same race. Reach out to one believer this week—either to receive encouragement or to offer it. Don't isolate yourself in this journey.

Day 4: Citizens of Heaven

****Reading:**** Philippians 3:17-21; Colossians 3:1-4

****Devotional:****

"Our citizenship is in heaven"—what a perspective-shifting truth! We live in this world but don't belong to it. Paul warns against those whose "mind is set on earthly things," whose God is their appetites and temporary pleasures. In contrast, believers eagerly await Christ's return and the transformation He will bring. This world, with all its struggles, tragedies, and disappointments, is not our final home. When life feels fragile and uncertain, this hope anchors us. Our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like His glorious body. No more pain, sorrow, or death. Today, when earthly concerns threaten to overwhelm you, pause and remember: you're just passing through. How does living as a citizen of heaven change your priorities today?

Day 5: The Prize Worth Running For

****Reading:**** 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Timothy 4:6-8

****Devotional:****

Every runner needs a compelling prize to endure the race's difficulties. Paul knew what awaited: eternal life, a resurrected body, and the presence of Jesus forever. This prize

makes every sacrifice, every struggle, every moment of pressing on worth it. Unlike earthly races where only one receives the prize, every believer who finishes faithfully receives the crown of righteousness. The journey may be long and grueling, but the destination is glorious. As you face today's challenges—whether physical pain, relational strain, or spiritual weariness—remember what you're running toward. The old order of things will pass away. Keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of your faith. What temporary comfort or shortcut is tempting you to abandon the race? Recommit today to finishing faithfully.

****Reflection Questions for the Week:****

- What does "knowing Christ" mean practically in your daily life?
- Who is one person you can encourage to keep pressing on in their faith?
- How does the promise of heaven change the way you face today's difficulties?
- What spiritual progress can you celebrate from the past year?