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"I Press on Toward the Goal for the Prize"



By Steven J. Hogan

~ A Saturday Morning Post #245 ~

It always amazes me when I read about Paul's life. How did he do all that he did? How did He endure all that suffering? (2 Cor. 12:23-28). There's no doubt it was by grace (1 Cor. 15:10 – *"by the grace of God I am what I am."*). But it was also by hope. One reason we know hope was so important to Paul is the book of Philippians, for it contains nine specific references to the future, which means hope was a key factor in him persevering to the end. In two previous posts, #238 and #243, we looked at the first six references – Phil. 1:6, Phil. 1:9-11, Phil. 1:21-23, Phil. 2:9-11, Phil. 2:14-16, and Phil. 3:10-11. Today, I will look at the last three, found in Phil. 3:12-14, Phil. 3:21-22, and Phil. 4:5.

Philippians 3:12-14 – *"… I press on so that I may lay hold of that which also I was lay hold of by Christ Jesus"* This important prophecy passage focuses on how, and how long you should run your race for

God. What do we learn from these verses?
– **First,** if you are reading this, then it's obvious you are still alive. As a Christian, you are to keep pressing ahead until the end of your life, until you die or are raptured.

Second, you are to press on, which means to run, to follow after, to earnestly and energetically speed on toward the goal. It's believing (Heb. 11:6), working (2 Tim. 2:6), struggling (Eph. 6:11), suffering (Matt. 6:10-11), and persevering (Matt. 24:13). The Christian life is not easy, for there are many trials, challenges, conflicts, ailments, persecutions, and devilish attacks – and whether you feel like it or not, you must press ahead. Diligently and faithfully, keep doing the work God has given you to do and, soon enough, you will cross the finish line and be in heaven.

Third, Paul says, *"I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet"* (vs. 13). If you are alive, then you have not yet completed your earthly work. Eph. 2:10 tells us, *"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared beforehand..."* Christ Himself has taken hold of you, and for good and godly reasons. You're to love God and all the people He puts in your life; you're to be a witness to the lost; you're to make disciples; and you're to use your spiritual gift. Wholeheartedly serve the Lord, doing all He wants you to do. Col. 3:23-24

Fourth, you are *"forgetting what lies behind"* (vs. 13). Successful Christians forget the past. Everyone makes mistakes and has missed opportunities and regrets. I'm sure you have experienced good and bad things, had achievements and failures, and you need to forget them. A basketball player must quickly forget both the shots he misses and the shots he makes, and keep playing until the end of the game. Older Christians may reminisce, rest on their laurels, and think their race is done. They too must forget what lies behind. If you are in an 8-lap race, and you just finished the 7^{th} lap, then you are not to think about the 7 laps you just ran, but the one lap that remains.

You are *"reaching forward to what lies ahead"* (vs. 13). What is reaching forward? It conveys the idea of stretching a muscle to it's limit, of a runner pushing himself, striving to win the race. For the Christian, it's looking ahead and focusing on the future, it's running with desire and giving maximum effort. It's being in a race, and no matter how far you have gone, you are continuing to run, you are going forward, and finally, you will cross the finish line.

Fifth, you are to *"press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"* (vs. 14). You are not just pressing on to do the work God wants you to do (vs. 12), you are pressing on toward the goal. There's a finish line and a prize to be won when you reach the finish line, and you need to keep running until your race is over. A major aspect of hope is looking forward to receiving a generous prize for how you run the race, for competing "*according to the rules"* (2 Tim. 2:5), and for finishing the race. This prize, this eternal blessing for your earthly work, is also described as treasures (Matt. 6:20), recompense (Luke 14:15), rewards (Col. 3:24), crowns (2 Tim. 4:8), and inheritance (1 Pet. 1:4).

Here are more important points about this passage:
1. No matter who you are, wherever and whenever you live, how old you are, how long you have been saved, God has a race for you to run. *"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."* Hebrews 12:1-2

2. Our culture talks a lot about retirement, and what you can do after you retire. Now maybe you are done working at a *"job"*, but you are never done with your heavenly work. Don't let the *"eat, drink, and be merry"* attitude (Lk. 12:19) of many retirees affect how you live for God. Your work and your pace may change, but you need to complete the work God wants you to do. Acts 13:36

3. That we live in the end-times gives added weight to this passage. Just

think, you may be raptured. If that's true, then finishing your earthly race will coincide with Christ's return to rapture the church. Here's a hypothetical: if Christ comes back in 20 years, then you only have 20 years left to live and work for the Lord. If you're now 25, then you will be 45 when Christ returns, or if you're now 50, then you will be 70. In these end-times, don't be so naïve to think that you will live what is thought to be a full life, to 70 or older. Whatever happens, keep pressing, keep doing God's work until the very end – *"be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord."* 1 Corinthians 15:58

4. Ask God to give you the grace to finish strong, to keep racing until you *"break the tape"*, whether that's by death or by rapture. Might you then say, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. In the future, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me that day, and… to all who have loved His appearing."* 2 Timothy 4:7-8
5. God Himself will call you home to heaven. Whether you physically die or are raptured, it will happen soon, and be the best day of your life (Eccl. 7:1). Look forward to seeing Jesus, your Savior and Lord, the One who loves you more than anyone else!

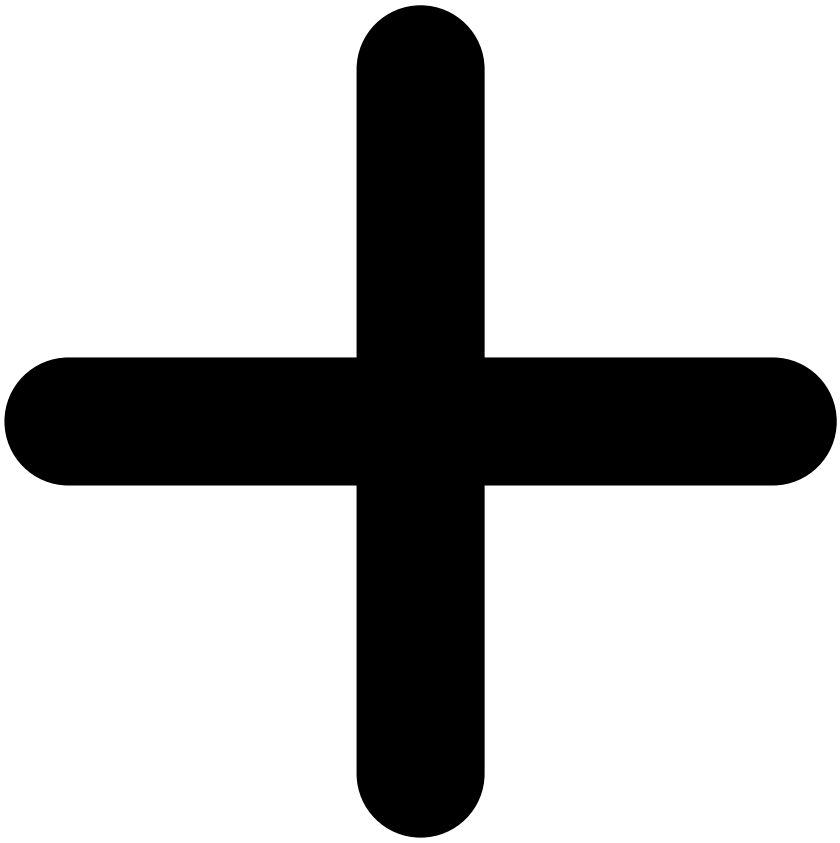
Philippians 3:21-22. *"We eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory…"* Our bodies get old, tired, and weak, and we still sin. But remember, your salvation is not yet complete, but it will be when Christ comes back, for then you will be wonderfully transformed. Your brand-new body will be like Jesus' body – it will be beautiful, powerful, immortal, glorified, and perfectly fit for an eternity of worshiping God, of serving Him, reigning with Him, fellowshipping with saints, and experiencing His glory and His love. 1 Cor 15:42-44, 53-54; 2 Cor. 5:1-5; 1 John 3:2-3; Rev. 21:3-7

Philippians 4:5. *"The Lord is near."* The word *"near"* can be defined as near in space or near in time. This two-fold truth is most encouraging,

for we live in the end-times. Thus, we know two things, that the Lord is always and literally with us in a spiritual sense, and that it won't be long before we will physically be with Him. *"The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout… we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord."* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

Grace and hope must be an essential part of your daily life. The last two verses in the Bible remind us of this – *"'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen."* Revelation 22:20-21

P.S. What a privilege that God has called us to run in the greatest of races, the Christian marathon – a lifetime of serving the Lord. I would encourage you to read these two articles that I believe will help you successfully run for Him and carry out the work He wants you to do – *"Your Spiritual Service: A Member of the Special Forces"* and *"The Excellent End-Times' Worker."*



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