

# Jesus Is Lord: Yakety Yak Don't Look Back (Philippians 3:12-16)

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## Intro

“Objects in mirror are closer than they appear.” This is the safety reminder engraved on the passenger side mirror of all motor vehicles in the US, Canada, Nepal, India, and Saudi Arabia. This warning is needed because while the convexity of the mirror gives them a useful field of view, it distorts the object and makes it smaller. The warning serves as a reminder to the driver of this potential problem when looking behind.

The passage of scripture we will read today serves a similar purpose: *be careful when looking in the mirror of your past.* Better than looking in the past, strain forward to what lies ahead.

**Read Philippians 3:12-16 and Pray**

## Behind (3:12-16)

Paul eloquently sums up the greatest threat to spiritual **growth, your big behind.** It is our pasts, bad decisions, shameful sins, hurtful situations, regrets, triumphs, and good old days that keep us looking in the rear-view mirror. *God wants you to thrive spiritually in a growing relationship with your heavenly Father through faith in the Son.*

**Denial** - *Christ-likeness never happens when you look and live in the past.* Paul immediately and freely admits that he is not perfect (a word that means to “bring one’s character to perfection”) The Bible immediately wakes us up with the reminder that no one has “arrived” spiritually prior to the day of Christ Jesus. It is ok to admit it!

The apostle addressed two deadly doctrines threatening the local church at Philippi. First, some had an attitude of **moral perfectionism**. Hansen says is best, “Apparently, others consider themselves to be perfect, in their self-assessment, they are totally satisfied with themselves and confident that they have already arrived at the apex of human achievement” On the other hand he was correcting an attitude of **moral liberalism**, that because of Christ you could do anything you wanted. **Denial of your daily need for grace is a catastrophic spiritual failure.**

**But- Discouragement-** The right perspective that he is imperfect does not discourage Paul from pursuing growth in his relationship with Jesus. He refused to become discouraged and at the same time rejects hypocrisy. What is discouragement? **It is a loss of confidence or enthusiasm.** *If you are found in Christ you cannot be lost, but the enemy wants you to lose confidence.*

**A Damaged Grip-** “I make every effort to take hold.” The world’s most famous missionary admits this holding onto Christ thing is difficult! But ever since Paul was grasped and apprehended by Christ, he has a desire to grasp and comprehend Christ. But **“To know the incomprehensible greatness of Christ demands a lifetime of arduous inquiry.”** The spiritual life is much like falling out of a white water raft. **It is near impossible to pull yourself back into the raft one you capsize. They teach you to grip the side of the raft, kick your legs, and let someone already inside the raft pull you to safety. Its ok to acknowledge your grip is weak because you have a savior that will not let you go!**

*Transition: if our behinds hinder us from pursuing fully the power of Christ working in our lives, what hope to we have? Remember one thing—the highest priority is Jesus Christ who must captivate your full attention and demands total concentration. And you cannot reach forward until you stop looking behind.*

## Reaching Forward (3:12-16)

**Forgetting-** Paul employs the development of a race metaphor: I do not look back at my failures or successes; I strain forward with all determination so that I can win the prize (Silva)

Forgetting is not a *passive* loss of memory; no, it is an *active*, continuous discipline of the mind and heart. Although he did not actively forget the past, he emphatically chose to disregard it. He forcefully rejected it. He openly declared a nonobservance of his past achievements

Why is this crucial? Because **Dwelling on the past only hinders your present effort and future.** The good ole days are never as good- or old- as you think they are. And they hinder your present effort. Looking back at the darkness of your past only deters you from actively pursuing Christ. Forgetting what is behind → **Reach forward.**

**Why actively forget?** The enemy uses our past in two primary ways to distract us from our pursuit of Jesus Christ.

- 1. Guilt of past sin.** Often our pasts are so laden with vile rebellion against the Lord that we simply deny the power of Christ to forgive and redeem. Who was Paul? A murder and persecutor of the church. Maybe you were walking with Christ and some sin, hurt by the church, or other past even has damaged you and to be here today is about all the strength you have. Maybe you feel unqualified to do what the Lord is asking you to do because of your past: **Do not let your yesterday prevent you from pursuing Christ today.**
- 2. Glory of the past.** Often, we reminisce on the good old days: past achievements, financial success, spiritual traditions, or even previous movements of the Holy Spirit. We are prone to get stuck in the past when we saw God work: Billy Graham crusade, youth choir, revivals, concerts, skinny jeans. What must declare a non-observance on past achievements. What we should say is: God radically transformed my lives by \_\_\_\_\_ and I can’t wait to see what he will do today.

**Reaching Forward**—In Jesus, we don't fall ahead we reach forward. This is the only time this word straining appears in the NT. This verb means to “**exert oneself to the uttermost.**” Paul desires to encourage progress and joy in the faith. This progress requires that we reach out and seize every opportunity to grow in faith in Jesus Christ. **What opportunity has the Lord given you today to serve him? To make a difference in the world? To share His good news?** In Jesus, we don't fall ahead we reach (look at the picture).

**Pursue the goal**—Again the Holy Word uses active energetic language to describe the faith. The word press/pursue is like one who is in a race running **swiftly** to reach the goal. It's the same root word that Paul, most likely with tears, used when he described his persecuting/pressing of the church in Philippians 3:6. **We pursue swiftly--have no time to waste.** *Yesterday and tomorrow are favorite vocabulary of the Enemy.*

**What is the goal and prize?** Although the actual content of the goal is not specifically defined by Paul, the image of the goal carries forward the thrust of Paul's point: *running the race of faith in Christ demands **concentration** on the finish line*

Paul is urging those who follow the way of Christ to reach—stretch—pursue—and run. **If you are weary today do not give up!** If you think the finish line is near—do not stop. The purpose of the community of faith reaching and running together is that we will not give up as we look to the prize of seeing our God face to face.

**Promised by God's heavenly Call-** Paul uses the word call as a technical term to refer to the **act of God** that ‘**brings the one called into fellowship** with Christ and at the same time into fellowship with other members of his body’ (Hansen, 256). *You have been called! Today you have heard the good news!*

Because of the call of Christ, Paul is no longer pursuing/persecuting the church but pursuing and pressing to the goal.

## Response

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The authenticity of faith in Christ cannot be measured only by the intensity of one's initial decision to receive Christ. Receiving Christ is a lifetime adventure. (Hansen, 249).

### Invitation Video

<https://youtu.be/38ffcRexi4>

Today, maybe for the first time you realized you are not right before God. You have been relying on a “decision” you made and there has been no striving/reaching for Jesus I your life. You don't have “fire insurance” you have false assurance. Salvation is by faith (human response to God's grace).

**Are you coasting? Don't let the enemy see you on the sidelines. Will you know one thing today: forgetting- Reach- pursue- the prize- of the heavenly call- in Christ Jesus.**



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## Important Words

### Root used in 1:6, 3:12, 3:15, and 3:19

#### End/complete/ accomplish 5048. τελειω; *teleioō*

1. *to carry through completely; to accomplish, finish, bring to an end: ton dromon*, Acts 20:24; *to ergon*, John 4:34; 5:36; 17:4,(Neh. 6:16; *ton oikon*, 2 Chr. 8:16); *tas hēmeras*, Luke 2:43; middle (present cf. Buttmann, 38 (33)) *teleioumai*, *I finish complete, what was given me to do*, Luke 13:32 (some (so A. V.) take it here as passive, *I am perfected* (understanding it of his death; cf. Ellicott, *Life of our Lord*, Lect. vi., p. 242 n 1; Keim, ii., 615 n 1)).

2. *to complete (perfect), i.e. add what is yet lacking in order to render a thing full: tēn agapēn*, passive, 1 John 2:5; 4:12,17; *hē dunamis mou en astheneia teleioutai*, my power shows itself most efficacious in them that are weak, 2 Cor. 12:9 R G; *ek tōn ergōn hē pistis eteleiōthē*, by works faith was perfected, made such as it ought to be, James 2:22; *teteleiōtai tis en tē agapē*, one has been made perfect in love, his love lacks nothing, 1 John 4:18 (*hoi teleiōthentes en agapē*, Clement of Rome, 1 Cor. 50,3; (*teleiōsai tēn ekklēsian sou en tē agapē sou*, ‘Teaching’ etc. 10, 5)); *hina ōsi teteleiōmenoi eis hen*, that they may be perfected into one, i.e. perfectly united, John 17:23. **tina, to bring one’s character to perfection: ēdē teteleiōmai, I am already made perfect, Phil. 3:12** (WisSol 4:13; *ō psuchē ... hotan teleiōthēs kai brabeiōn kai stefanōn axiōthēs*, Philo de legg. alleg. 3, 23; *psuchē ... teleiōtheisa en aretōn athlois kai epi ton horon efikomenē tou kalou*, id. de somn. 1, 21; equivalent to *to be footpad perfect*, Sir. 34:10 (Sir. 31:10)).

3. *to bring to the end (goal) proposed: ouden*, Heb. 7:19; *tina, (to perfect or consummate) i.e. to raise to the state befitting him: so of God exalting Jesus to the state of heavenly majesty*, Heb. 2:10; in the passive, Heb.5:9; 7:28; *to raise to the state of heavenly blessedness those who put their faith in the expiatory death of Christ*, passive, Heb. 11:40; 12:23 ((Act. Petr. et Paul. sec. 88, Tdf. edition, p. 39; Act. Barnab. sec. 9, id., p. 68; cf. ‘Teaching’ etc. 16, 2); with *marturiō* added, of the death of the apost. Paul, Eusebius, h. e. 9, 22, 2 (cf. Heinichen’s note on 7, 15, 5)); to make one, meet for future entrance on this state and give him a sure hope of it even here on earth, Heb. 10:1,14; *tina kata suneidēsīn*, Heb. 9:9; cf. Bleek, *Brief an d. Hebrew 2:1*, p. 297ff; C. R. Köstlin, *Lehrbegriff des Evang. u. der Briefe Johannis* (Berl. 1843), p. 421ff; Riehm, *Lehrbegriff des Hebrew-Br.*, sec. 42, p. 340ff; Pfeleiderer, *Paulinismus*, p. 344f. (English translation, ii, p. 72ff).

4. *to accomplish, i.e. bring to a close or fulfilment by event: tēn grafēn*, the prophecies of Scripture, passive, John 19:28 (cf. Winer’s *Grammar*, 459 (428); Buttmann, sec. 151, 20).\*

## Take Hold

Phil. 3:12 Ουχ οτι ηδη **ελαβον** η ηδη τετελειωμαι, διωκω δε ει και **καταλαβω**, εφ ω και **κατελημφθην** υπο Χριστου Ιησου. 13 αδελφοι, εγω εμαυτον ου λογιζομαι **κατειληφεναι** εν δε, τα μεν οπισω επιλανθανομενος τοις δε εμπροσθεν επεκτεινομενος,

### 2983. λαμβανω; *lambanō*;

3. *to take what is one's own, to take to oneself, to make one's own*; a. *to claim, procure, for oneself*: *ti*, John 3:27 (opposed to what is given); *heautō basileian*, Luke 19:12; with the accusative of the person *to associate with one's self as companion, attendant, etc.*: *labōn tēn speiran erchetai*, taking with him the band of soldiers (whose aid he might use) he comes, John 18:3 (*straton labōn erchetai*, Sophocles Trach. 259); *lambanein guanika, to take i.e. marry a wife*, Mark 12:19-22; Luke 20:28-31 (Gen. 4:19, etc.; Xenophon, Cyril 8, 4, 16; Bur. Alc. 324; with *heautō* added, Gen. 4:19; 6:2, and often). b. of that which when taken is not let go, like the Latin *capio*, equivalent to *to seize, lay hold of, apprehend*: *tina*, Matt. 21:35, 39; Mark 12:3, 8, and very often in Greek writings from Homer down; tropically, *ti*, i.e. **to get possession of, obtain, a thing**, Phil. 3:12 (cf. Winer's Grammar, 276 (259)); metaphorically, of affections or evils seizing on a man (Latin *capio, occupo*): *tina elaben ekstasis*, Luke 5:26; *fobos*, Luke 7:16 (very often so even in Homer, as *tromos ellabe guia*, Iliad 3, 34; *me himeros hairai*, 3, 446; *cholos*, 4, 23; the Septuagint Exo. 15:15; WisSol 11:13 (12)); *pneuma* (i.e., a demon), Luke 9:39; *peirasmos*, 1 Cor. 10:13. c. *to take by craft* (our *catch*, used of hunters, fishermen, etc.): *ouden*, Luke 5:5; tropically, *tina*, *to circumvent one by fraud*, 2 Cor. 11:20; with *dolō* added, 2 Cor. 12:16. d. *to take to oneself, lay hold upon, take possession of, i.e. to appropriate to oneself*: *heautō tēn timēn*, Heb. 5:4. e. Latin *capto, catch at, reach after, strive to obtain*: *ti para tinos* (the genitive of person), John 5:34,41; alternating with *zētein*, John 5:44. f. *to take a thing due according to agreement or law, to collect, gather* (tribute): *ta didrachma*, Matt. 17:24; *telē apo tinos*, 25; *dekatas*, Heb. 7:8f; *karpous*, Matt.

**1. to lay hold of so as to make one's own, to obtain, attain to: with the accusative of the thing; the prize of victory, 1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:12f; tēn dikaiosunēn**, Rom. 9:30; equivalent to *to make one's own, to take into oneself, appropriate*: *hē skotia auto* (i.e. *to fōs*) *ou katelaben*, John 1:5.

**2. to seize upon, take possession of** (Latin *occupare*); a. of evils overtaking one (so in Greek writings from Homer down): *tina skotia*, John 12:35; (so physically, John 6:17 Tdf.); of the last day overtaking the wicked with destruction, 1 Thess. 5:4; of a demon about to torment one, Mark 9:18. b. **in a good sense, of Christ by his holy power and influence laying hold of the human mind and will, in order to prompt and govern it, Phil. 3:12.**

### Διωκω – pursue, persecute, to make effort to take hold

Phil. 3:6 regarding zeal, **persecuting** the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

Phil. 3:12 **Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus.**

Phil. 3:14 **I pursue** as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

**2. to run swiftly in order to catch some person or thing, to run after**; absolutely (Homer, Iliad 23, 344; Sophocles El. 738, etc.; *diōkein dromō*, Xenophon, an. 6, 5, 25; cf. 7, 2, 20), *to press on*: figuratively, **of one**

**who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal, Phil. 3:12** (where distinguished from *katalambanein* (cf. Herodotus 9, 58; Lucian, *Hermot.* 77)), Phil. 3:14. *to pursue* (in a hostile manner): *tina*, Acts 26:11; Rev. 12:13.

**3. Hence, in any way whatever to harass, trouble, molest one; to persecute**, (cf. Latin *persequor*, German *verfolgen*): Matt. 5:10-12,44; 10:23; Luke 21:12; (11:49 WH Tr marginal reading); John 5:16; 15:20; Acts 7:52; 9:4f; 22:4,7f; 26:14f; Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12; 15:9; 2 Cor. 4:9; Gal. 1:13,23; 4:29; 5:11; **Phil. 3:6**; 2 Tim. 3:12; passive with a dative denoting the cause, *to be maltreated, suffer persecution on account of something*, Gal. 6:12 (here L marginal reading T read *diōkontai* (others, *diōkōntai*), see WH's Appendix, p. 169; on the dative see Winer's Grammar, sec. 31, 6 c.; Buttman, 186 (161)).

**Phil. 3:12** Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus.

Reached what? In this particular case (the lack of direct object) the object is undoubtedly the resurrection in v. 11 (Silva, 174)

It must be emphasized that the resurrection stand here not as an isolated event, but as the culmination of the Christian hope.

On one hand, Paul is correcting an attitude of moral perfectionism. On the other hand, Paul is also correcting an attitude of moral libertinism (Hansen, 249).

### Perfect

Only when he sees Christ face to face will he be totally transformed by Christ's power to be like him (3:20-21) (Hansen, 251).

His imperfection does not discourage him from pursuing growth in his relationship with Christ (Hansen, 251).

Apparently, others consider themselves to be perfect, in their self-assessment, they are totally satisfied with themselves and confident that they have already arrived at the apex of human achievement (Hansen, 252).

### Taken hold

Ever since Paul was grasped and apprehended by Christ, he has a desire to grasp and comprehend Christ. But "to know the incomprehensible greatness of Christ demands a lifetime of arduous inquiry" (Hansen, 250).

**13** Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead,

### Brothers

Spiritual pursuit is not reserved for super-apostles. It is for the brethren the entire community of faith (Motyer, 175).

### **One thing**

The highest priority in his life captivates his full attention and demands total concentration. The tyranny of urgent needs, the clamor of popular voices, the top news of the day all take a pale second place to the one overarching goal of Paul's life (Hansen, 253).

### **Forgetting**

Paul employs the development of a race metaphor: I do not look back at my failures or successes; I strain forward with all determination so that I can win the prize (Silva)

Forgetting is not a passive loss of memory; no, it is an active, continuous discipline of the mind and heart. Although he did not actively forget the past, he emphatically chose to disregard it. He forcefully rejected it. He openly declared a nonobservance of his past achievements (Hansen, 254).

It is the sort of dwelling on the past that hinders our present effort and our future progress (Motyer, 176).

### **Stretch out/reaching**

This is the only time this word straining appears in the NT. This verb means to “exert oneself to the uttermost.”

**13.20 επεκτεινομαι:** to attempt energetically to attain a state or condition — ‘to seek strongly to, to try hard to.’ τοις δε εμπροσθεν επεκτεινομενος ‘doing one's best to attain those things that are ahead’  
**Php 3:13.**

Paul desires to encourage progress and joy in the faith. This progress requires that we reach out and seize every opportunity to grow in faith in Jesus Christ.

Although the actual content of the goal is not specifically defined by Paul, the image of the goal carries forward the thrust of Paul's point: running the race of faith in Christ demands concentration on the finish line (Hansen, 255).

**14** I **pursue** as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus.

The authenticity of faith in Christ cannot be measured only by the intensity of one's initial decision to receive Christ. Receiving Christ is a lifetime adventure (Hansen, 249).

There is an impressive activity about Christian progress (Motyer, 176).

### **Press/pursue**

*to run swiftly in order to catch some person or thing, to run after*; absolutely (Homer, Iliad 23, 344; Sophocles El. 738, etc.; *diōkein dromō*, Xenophon, an. 6, 5, 25; cf. 7, 2, 20), *to press on*: figuratively, **of one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal, Phil. 3:12** (where distinguished from *katalambanein* (cf. Herodotus 9, 58; Lucian, Hermot. 77)), Phil. 3:14. *to pursue* (in a hostile manner): *tina*, Acts 26:11; Rev. 12:13.

## Prize

Sometimes a thing is all the more impressive for being left undescribed. Paul tells us neither what the goal is nor what the prize will be (Motyer, 177).

## Call

Paul uses the word call as a technical term to refer to the act of God that ‘brings the one called into fellowship with Christ and at the same time into fellowship with other members of his body’ (Hansen, 256).

Because of the call of Christ, Paul is no longer pursuing/persecuting the church but pursuing and pressing to the goal.

**15** Therefore, let all of us who are mature think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you.

Maturity is taking Paul’s view of things, having Paul’s attitude, and adopting Paul’s way of thinking (Hansen, 258).

Maturity = genuine humility (not already arrived) and whole-hearted commitment-straining toward the goal (Hansen, 258).

**16** In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained.

**17** Join in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and pay careful attention to those who live according to the example you have in us. **18** For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things, **20** but our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a

Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup> He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.

# Illustrations

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Talk about a letdown. Check out Oregon Senior Tanguy Pepiot celebrating his win a bit too early, allowing Washington's Meron Simon to pass him at the finish line. Oregon Runner celebrates prematurely

## Press on – Gethsemane

*Gethsemane* appears in the Greek original of the Gospel of Matthew<sup>[1]</sup> and the Gospel of Mark<sup>[2]</sup> as Γεθσημανή (*Gethsēmanē*). The name is derived from the Aramaic ܓܬܫܡܢܗ (Gad-Šmānê), meaning "oil press".<sup>[3]</sup> Matthew (26:36) and Mark (14:32) call it χωρίον (18:1), meaning a place or estate. The Gospel of John says Jesus entered a garden (κῆπος) with his disciples.<sup>[4]</sup>

According to Luke 22:43–44, Jesus's anguish on the Mount of Olives (Luke does not mention Gethsemane; Luke 22:39-40) was so deep that "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

## Tortoise and the hare

John Wesley reflecting on this passage:

O grant that nothing in my soul  
    May dwell, but they pure love alone!  
O may thy love posses me whole.  
    My joy, my treasure, my crown  
Strange fires far from my heart remove;  
    My every act, word, though, be love!

# Application

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Paul provides a warning against the notion that it is possible to “arrive” spiritually prior to the day of Christ Jesus (Thielman, 201).

Philippians 3 stands as a warning against every teaching that assures the believer so completely of salvation that it engenders complacency (Thielman, 204).