

February 3

Lesson 10 (NIV)

PRESS ON IN CHRIST

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Corinthians

15:50–58

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Philippians

3:1–16

PHILIPPIANS 3:7–14

⁷But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.



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KEY VERSES

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.—Philippians 3:13, 14

OUR LOVE FOR GOD

Unit II: Loving God by Trusting Christ

LESSONS 6–10

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify faith in Christ as not just the condition of belonging to God but the compulsion for becoming like Christ.
2. Contrast a life that grows in Christlikeness with a life focused on status or attainments.
3. Identify and abandon one or more things that hinder his or her growth in Christlikeness.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Knowing Where You Are Going
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Gain and Loss (PHILIPPIANS 3:7–11)
 - A. Reevaluation of the Past (vv. 7, 8)
Not So “Nobel”
 - B. Righteousness in the Present (vv. 9, 10)
 - C. Resurrection in the Future (v. 11)
- II. Forgetting and Pressing (PHILIPPIANS 3:12–14)
 - A. Goal to Grasp (v. 12)

- B. Race to Finish (vv. 13, 14)
An Ongoing Process

Conclusion

- A. Knowing How You Are Doing
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Damascus	Duh-mass-kus.
Judaizers	Joo -duh-ize-ers.
Mosaic	Mo-zay-ik.
Philippians	Fih-lip-ee-unz.
Thessalonians	<i>Thess</i> -uh- lo -nee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).

Introduction

A. Knowing Where You Are Going

An old joke begins with the scene of a man driving his family to a certain destination, but they became lost. After a while, the wife asked the husband, “Do you know where you are going?” Choosing his words carefully, the husband paused a few seconds before replying, “No, I don’t. But we’re making excellent time!”

If we ever expect to arrive at our destination, we have to know where we are going. The route may need some discov-

ery and modification. But if we know where we are going, we can adjust to get there.

This obvious truth is part of the message of today's text. When we know where God has us going, we can be confident that in every circumstance we are still moving toward that blessed destination.

B. Lesson Context

Many circumstances had come together to create disunity in the Philippian church. We can surmise that personal differences and rivalries played a role. Certainly the selfishness to which all people are vulnerable was the fertile ground in which the problem grew. But another factor was the influence of those who advocated that Jewish people have a place of preeminence in the church. As in other churches founded by Paul, the Philippian church was troubled by those whom we identify as *Judaizers*. These insisted that to belong to God's people, believers in Jesus must toe the line with regard to the Law of Moses, especially the requirement for circumcision ([Philippians 3:2, 3](#)).

Paul understood, however, that Christ had brought the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. This meant that God accepted non-Jews as they were. Paul understood that the division between Jew and Gentile had

been taken away, making one body of anyone who accepted Christ ([Acts 2:37-39](#); [15:1-31](#); [Ephesians 2:11-22](#); [Colossians 3:11](#)). What faith produces is an identity marker of the people of God in Christ, not the keeping of the Law of Moses. If Christ came as the lowly servant of all (last week's lesson), then no follower of his can look upon another Christian as a second-class citizen of the kingdom of God. In Christ, all Christians are first-class citizens of that kingdom. Christ must be the standard that the church pursues in unity, not score-keeping regarding adherence to a set of laws.

In the context preceding our text, Paul had used himself as an example of this contrast. Others may make the claim to be the true, first-class people of God because of their observance of the Law of Moses, but Paul could make a greater claim. He was in all respects highly observant of all the laws that marked Israel as a distinctive people ([Philippians 3:4-6](#)). As our text begins, Paul declares what faith in Christ demands that he say regarding his attainments as a faithful observer of the law.

I. Gain and Loss ([PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11](#))

A. Reevaluation of the Past (vv. 7, 8)

7. But whatever were gains to me I

now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

In the verses before this one, Paul has just listed his outstanding characteristics as a Jew who meticulously observed the Law of Moses. These observances had been of supreme value to him, like profits on a balance sheet (*gains to me*). They were the things that had once defined his identity.

But Jesus has changed the basis for that identity. Paul now knows the crucified, risen Jesus as God's true king, the head of God's people. The only identity Paul has is Christ's identity.

Paul, of course, continues to identify as a Jew, or Israelite, after becoming a Christian ([Acts 21:39](#); [22:3](#); [Romans 11:1](#)). He does not deny his past or his heritage. In fact, he celebrates it; for in the history of Israel, God was at work to promise and prepare for the coming of Jesus. But compared with the supreme value of *Christ*, that former identity—valuable as Paul thought it to be—could *now* be considered loss.

8. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ

Paul amplifies his point from the previous verse. He calls attention to the strong contrast he is drawing: the phrase

translated *what is more* puts emphasis on the difference between his identification as a law-observant Jew and his new identification as a follower of Jesus. In fact, Paul says, all parts of his life, except for following Jesus, are now like his law-observant past: they are *loss* compared with that great gain or profit.

Paul has literally *lost all things* as a follower of Jesus. His commitment led him into conflict with people everywhere who opposed the gospel he preached, and he suffered physically and materially as a result ([2 Corinthians 11:23–33](#)). So here he interjects not just that he counts all things as loss but that in a real sense he has lost much because of Christ.

Garbage might not be a word that we would expect at this point. But Paul uses it to add to the emphasis on what he considers loss. In the original language, the word translated *garbage* can refer to any waste that has a repugnant smell. Paul's expression can hardly be stronger.

This loss of all things contrasts with the prospect that Paul *may gain Christ*. Here again Paul uses the language of accounting, but in a limited way. There is no idea here of somehow earning Christ as a something-for-something (quid pro quo) result of a swap. God gives us his blessing through Christ freely; it cannot be earned or purchased ([Acts 8:18–20](#); etc.). We respond in a way that expresses

that this gift is what we value most greatly.

NOT So “NOBEL”

Since 1991, the scientific humor magazine *Annals of Improbable Research* has planned and presented a parody of the annual Nobel Prize awards. The Ig Nobel Prizes (created from a play on the word *ignoble*), presented by actual Nobel laureates each fall, bring to light various trivial, unusual, or outright silly scientific research projects. By extension, the “awards” poke fun at those who find their identity in scientific research of dubious value. The ceremony concludes with the announcement, “If you didn’t win a prize—and especially if you did—better luck next year!”

Recent Ig Nobels were awarded for determining that acute appendicitis can be accurately diagnosed by the amount of pain patients experience when driven over speed bumps (diagnostic medicine), discovering why dragonflies are fatally attracted to black tombstones (physics), and asking a thousand liars how often they lie and then deciding whether to believe their answers (psychology).

At one time, Paul thought his long list of accomplishments were noble. But he learned on the road to Damascus and through the ministry experiences that followed that those were not adequate as

the ultimate context of his life. Which side of that fence are you on—the one that clings to diplomas, titles, and net assets as ultimate context, or the side that surrenders what cannot be kept, having received what cannot be lost?

—J. E.

B. Righteousness in the Present (vv. 9, 10)

9a. and be found in him,

Still elaborating on his point, Paul switches to a different description of his new identity in Christ. To *be found in him* certainly means to be fully identified as Christ’s follower. That in turn implies a life that is utterly committed to Christ, utterly trusting in Christ, but also a life that in its thoughts and actions deeply reflects Christ’s own life.

9b. not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

This identity with Christ, founded on the trusting belief that Jesus is indeed God’s true king, is the source of true *righteousness*. Here Paul uses *righteousness* to refer to genuine membership in God’s people, what we sometimes call “right standing with God.” What makes someone God’s person, Paul says, is not what he or she does in terms of keeping the

Mosaic law. Nor is it anything that anyone might do to try to make oneself the right kind of person to belong to God. Rather, *faith is the basis* of true righteousness.

Faith in Christ is different from the Mosaic law or other “on our own” means of belonging to God. That difference is that God has supplied the means of our salvation. So rather than putting trust in our abilities to be righteous, we put trust in him to provide all the righteousness we need. It is not “we do our best and God does the rest.” It is, rather, God does it all. When we realize that truth, we give control of our lives to him instead of holding onto them ourselves. It is making Jesus king.

What Do You Think?

How would you counsel someone who believes that Christ's righteousness keeps the Christian out of Hell, but one's personal righteousness gets him or her into Heaven?

Digging Deeper

How would you counsel that same person using only logic, neither quoting nor referring to Scripture passages?

10a. I want to know Christ—

Faith reorients one's life away from self-righteousness, self-reliance, and self-

fulfillment. In place of those, Christ becomes the focus—not only as the source of identity with God but also as the exemplar of the true life of God's people.

So *to know Christ* is not merely to know his story or even to affirm his authority, but to live a life that imitates his. In that way, one comes to know Christ by experience, consciously living to serve others as Christ did ([Mark 10:43-45](#); [Philippians 2:1-11](#)).

10b. yes, to know the power of his resurrection

Such a life is obviously costly. As Paul has noted, it cost him “all things.” How can one live with such a deep loss? Paul says that the follower of Christ also comes to know *the power of his resurrection*. Christ literally gave “all things” by willingly surrendering his life. But God the Father answered his loss with greater gain, raising Christ from the dead.

That same power God exercises for Christ's followers, meeting their needs as they suffer loss for the sake of Christ. And God even overcomes the greatest loss, death—however it comes to them—as they share in the resurrection from the dead ([1 Corinthians 15:20-28, 50-58](#); [2 Corinthians 5:1-10](#); [Philippians 1:21-24](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#)). No matter the circumstances, near or far, the power of Christ's resurrection is at work

in Christ's people. They come to know that power as they experience God's constant provision for their need.

10c. and participation in his sufferings,

Christ's gift was given through his suffering for others. His exaltation came in response to his suffering for others. Christ's followers join him in that suffering. This is not suffering for its own sake, suffering that hopes to impress God with one's dedication. Jesus did not die on the cross to prove how dedicated he was. Rather, Christ's suffering was suffering to bring blessing to others. Thus, Paul speaks of the *participation in Christ's sufferings*—not just sharing suffering with Christ, but sharing through suffering, as we give of our lives for the sake of others.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can a Christian expect life to change when he or she joins Paul in desiring to share in Christ's sufferings?

Digging Deeper

Which of the following texts speaks to your heart most strongly in this regard: [Romans 8:17](#); [2 Corinthians 1:5](#); [4:7-10](#); [1 Peter 4:13](#)?

10d. becoming like him in his death,

The climax of Christ's earthly ministry was his sacrificial death; and so for his followers, life takes that same shape.

Relatively few Christians will die as martyrs, but all Christians are to lead lives that are shaped by Christ's self-sacrifice. The Lord in whom we put our trust is the one after whom we model life. His life, we affirm, is the best life, even if it is starkly different from that led by the majority.

What Do You Think?

What qualities will others see in us when we get serious about living by Jesus' example?

Digging Deeper

Considering [Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23](#), what three challenges to your commitment are you most likely to encounter?

C. Resurrection in the Future (v. 11)

11. and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

For all writers of the New Testament, discussion of Christ's death inevitably leads to discussion of his resurrection. Having just spoken of knowing the power of Christ's resurrection, Paul now speaks of *the resurrection* as a future hope.

We should not mistake the significance of *somehow, attaining* in this verse. As he uses the word *if* in [Philippians 2:1](#), here Paul uses *somehow* not to cast doubt (as in "perhaps") but with assurance ("indeed it will be the case, somehow, some

way”).

Similarly, *attaining* does not indicate “earning” or “achieving,” but rather “arriving” or “coming to” (compare those translations of the same word in [Acts 16:1](#); [18:19](#), [24](#)). Paul does not see resurrection as something that he must prove worthy of but rather as something to which God will faithfully bring him by his grace.

As Paul contemplates his future, he is confident by faith in Christ that God’s promise of resurrection *from the dead* will be the climax of his future. Until that day, Paul remains uncertain as to exactly what will befall him, though he remains confident of God’s constant provision and of the final resurrection.

We can note in passing that Paul knows something about resurrection, having performed one himself ([Acts 20:7–12](#)). So Paul is not uncertain about the outcome of resurrection but of the circumstances through which he will journey to that point.

II. Forgetting and Pressing

([PHILIPPIANS 3:12–14](#))

A. Goal to Grasp (v. 12)

12a. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal,

Having looked forward to the

promised resurrection, Paul assesses his present situation. Make no mistake: God’s full purpose for Paul is not yet achieved. The resurrection that he will one day have will be the full realization of God’s purpose. This is not just for Paul but for all of God’s people, as those still living are united with the risen dead, both transformed to a new existence ([1 Corinthians 15:50–55](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:13–18](#)).

That is the sense in which the phrase *arrived at my goal* is used here (a change from “been made perfect” in the 1984 edition of the [NIV](#)). In Paul’s original language, this indicates “finishing a purpose” (compare [John 4:34](#); [5:36](#); [17:4](#)). As it is God’s goal and God who accomplishes it, this future is certain.

12b. but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

But God’s action demands Paul’s response. Prompted by faith, he must participate in what God is doing. *Christ* has taken *hold of* Paul for a purpose. That purpose is that Paul’s life should be transformed to be like Christ’s life, culminating in resurrection from the dead. So Paul ministers in light of that goal with his entire being. The resurrection from the dead to come shapes his entire ministry effort.

What Do You Think?

How will the certainty of future resurrection shape your attitudes and actions from this day forward?

Digging Deeper

Knowing that attitudes shape action, in what ways have you seen the reverse—actions of yours that have modified your attitudes?

B. Race to Finish (vv. 13, 14)

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

Taking hold of the future is a lifelong process. Assured of God's victory, Paul pursues that future with abandon. His past, whatever its honor or shame, he no longer values. The future is his focus. It will not merely be a never-ending life, but a fully transformed life. It will be a life brought into complete conformity with the image of God in Christ.

In the resurrection, all Christ's people will be like him (1 John 3:2). We, like Paul, will have been transformed from the selfish behavior of this present age to reflect completely Christ the selfless servant. Until then, we are being transformed to be what we will be fully when raised from the dead (Romans 8:29; 2 Peter 1:4).

It is no surprise, then, that Paul can compare baptism, which occurs at the beginning of the Christian walk, with "resurrection" (Romans 6:3-11; compare Colossians 2:12), as it initiates the transformation, the overcoming of sin and becoming more like Christ.

What Do You Think?

What is the next thing you need to be reaching for in your pursuit of becoming more like Jesus?

Digging Deeper

What things or thoughts will you need to let go of in order to reach that goal? Why?

14. I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Thus, Paul can allude to his life as being an arduous, long-distance race (compare 1 Corinthians 9:24; Galatians 2:2; Hebrews 12:1). At the end lies the prize, the one for which he was called to the starting line by God ... in Christ Jesus. That prize is to be like Christ in his divinely granted resurrection. The prize is given to all who finish, for the prize is the Lord's gracious gift (2 Timothy 4:7, 8). But the race is nevertheless the pursuit of the goal, in which each moment must bring one closer. If we believe in the Christ who died and rose, the pursuit of the prize becomes all that matters to us.

AN ONGOING PROCESS

During a prayer service at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on June 17, 2015, 21-year-old Dylann Roof killed nine people. Roof was arrested the next morning. He later confessed that he committed the horrible act in the Charleston, South Carolina, church hoping to ignite a race war; all those killed were African-Americans.

Roof's website substantiated his racist views. It contained photos of Roof posing with symbols of white supremacy and neo-Nazism. Roof longed to widen the racial divide in the country and thwart hopes of racial unity.

But Roof's actions did not accomplish his goal. Later, at Roof's hearing, some survivors and family members of victims offered this troubled young man their forgiveness and promised to pray for him. On the following Sunday evening, a racially diverse crowd estimated at 20,000 marched peacefully through the city in a show of solidarity for those slain.

Everyone knows that the goal of racial unity cannot be achieved with a single rally. It is an ongoing process that must be accomplished with perseverance as we confront evil day after day with love and forgiveness.

Paul the apostle recognized that personal change does not happen overnight. There are many distractions along the

way of "the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." But the goal toward which he strove daily is worth any sacrifice necessary to attain it. Certainly, the same is true for each of us as we anticipate resurrection while striving to correct personal and societal flaws. If there's something you are not yet willing to give up in that regard, be assured that Satan will attempt to use it as a hindrance.

—J. E.

Conclusion

A. Knowing How You Are Doing

Today's text certainly prompted the Philippian Christians to reassess the direction of their lives. Remembering Christ's life, death, and resurrection, looking forward to resurrection and life with him at his return—these meant that the readers' present lives had to be transformed into greater likeness to Christ. There was no place for the division that had begun to afflict this congregation (compare [Philippians 4:2](#)). There was only room for self-giving service, empowered by the risen Lord.



Visual for Lesson 10. Point to this visual as you ask, "What are some common hindrances that come our way in the race of the Christian life?"

We are confronted with the same need for self-assessment. What is our direction? Are we caught up in our own achievement or dragged down by our failures? Are we wrapped up in ourselves? We can begin a self-assessment by considering how Paul evaluated his own losses and gains. As a Christian, he had a difficult, miserable life (again, [2 Corinthians 11:22-33](#)). But Christ showed him that real worth is found in trusting God's provision and giving oneself for others as Christ gave himself for us. The end result will be worth it: resurrection and eternity with Christ.

Christ calls us to continue the race, to renew our reassessment of profit and loss, to remember the one who laid hold of us so that we can lay hold of that to which he called us. How is Christ calling you to be more like him?

B. Prayer

Father, empower us for the race ahead! As we run that race, may we reflect on your grace anew and run with the end in view: the goal of resurrected, eternal life. We pray in the name of the one who makes this possible, your Son. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Let the goal of the Christian life shape your now.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

Before class, write the following or similar on separate index cards: \$5 coffee gift card; porcelain angel; fidget spinner; new laptop; all-expense paid trip to Israel; old bus; log cabin; \$450,000 house. You will need as many cards as you have participants, so add to or subtract from these as needed. Put cards in separate envelopes, which you number from 1 upwards.

Shuffle the envelopes, then give each learner one. As you do, say, “We are going to play a version of the white-elephant game. Please don’t open your envelope yet.” After each person has one, ask the learner with envelope #1 to open it and read the card. That person can then either keep the card or trade for someone else’s, all other cards being unknown at this point. (*Option.* Stipulate that each card can change hands only once.) Proceed until everyone has had a turn. (*Option.* Allow more than one turn each, depending on class size.) Then ask, “Generally speaking, how do we assign value to things?”

Alternative. Distribute copies of the

“Ultimate Prizes?” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Announce a one-minute time limit. After announcing correct answers, ask, “Which of these prizes would you most want to win and why?”

After either activity, make a transition by saying, “If we were to repeat this activity years from now, our choices and desires may be very different. That’s because the values we assign change as new alternatives come along. The reasoning behind the apostle Paul’s change in what he valued has much to teach us in this regard.”

Into the Word

Read [Philippians 3:7](#) (only). Then divide the class into *The Before Group* and *The After Group*. Give each group a hand-out (you prepare) with instructions as follows. *The Before Group:* Beginning with Paul’s statement about gain and loss, work backward two verses and forward two verses to discover specific things Paul previously considered gain but ultimately decided were loss. *The After Group:* Read [Philippians 3:8-14](#) and find specific things Paul considered to be gain after being called to the service of Christ.

Have groups summarize findings in whole-class discussion. (*Expected responses—The Before Group:* things Paul ultimately decided were loss are listed in

