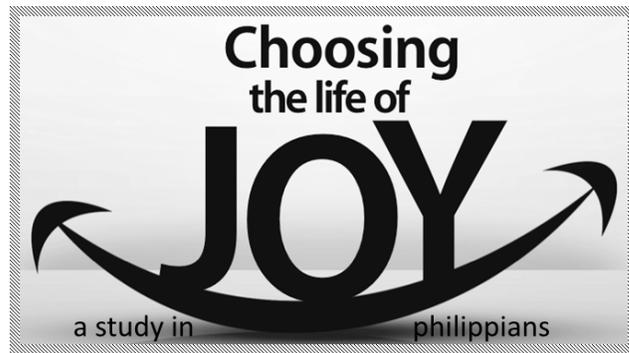


# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, January 23, 2019 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



## CHOOSING THE LIFE OF JOY

A Study in Philippians

“The Attitude of Those Who Run Toward Joy”

*The Christian Growth Process*

*Philippians 3:12-16*

Philippians, “a personal manifesto on how to live a life full of joy.” Dr. Warren Wiersbe We began our verse by verse study of the book of Philippians a couple of weeks ago entitled, “Choosing the Life of Joy; A Study in Philippians.” The book is a book of joy, and that is surprising given the circumstances surround the book.

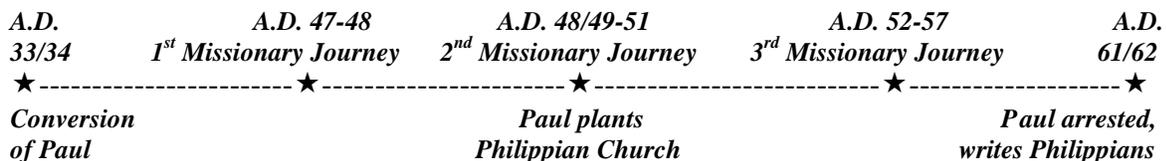
Just for review let’s be reminded of some of the more interesting facts about Philippians that we have been looking at as a background to the book.

**5 Important Background Facts on the Book of Philippians:** *\*these may be some things that set the book of Philippians apart from Paul’s other letters and writings*

- 1. The book of Philippians is written by the Apostle Paul** – The apostle Paul wrote the book as clearly stated in Philippians 1:1-2, “<sup>1</sup>Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- 2. The book of Philippians is written to believers/Christians at the church at Philippi** – As already stated Philippians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul during his Roman imprisonment to a group of people that were very special to him. These at Philippi had come to know the Lord Jesus through Paul’s witness to them during his “Second Missionary Journey,” and in response to the “Macedonian Call” of Acts 16. Notice who Paul identifies as the recipients of this letter in verses 1-2, “<sup>1</sup>Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

3. **The book of Philippians is actually a letter written by Paul to the church at Philippi** – The apostle Paul wrote this as a letter to the Christians in Philippi, from Rome. Paul ministered at Philippi during his second missionary journey, spending about three months in the city. The ministry at Philippi marked Paul’s entrance into Macedonia (Greece, Europe), which came about as a result of a vision he had in the city of Troas, just across the northeastern corner of the Aegean Sea from the port city of Neapolis and its close neighbor Philippi (Acts 16:8–12). During this first stay in Philippi—he later briefly visited the city on his third missionary journey (20:6)—Paul brought to faith in Christ people who would form the core of the burgeoning congregation in the city. Among them were Lydia, a businesswoman who opened her home to Paul and his coworkers (16:13–15), and the Philippian jailer, who was converted under Paul’s ministry after an earthquake miraculously broke open the prison (16:22–34).
4. **The book of Philippians was written around A.D. 61/62** – Of the four Prison Epistles, Paul likely wrote Philippians last, near the end of his Roman imprisonment in AD 61 or 62. Paul sent the other three Prison Epistles—Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon—by the hand of Tychicus, as their destinations were near one another. However, the letter to the Philippians was to be delivered by Epaphroditus, who had come to Paul in Rome with financial help from the church at Philippi (Philippians 2:25; 4:18). But during his time in Rome, Epaphroditus took ill, which delayed his return home and, therefore, the delivery of the letter (2:26–27).

***Philippians Timeline***



5. **The book of Philippians is called a prison epistle, because Paul write the letter while he was imprisoned for his faith in Rome** - The book of Philippians is actually one of four “prison epistles” (or letters) and most likely the last of the four written by Paul. As stated, Paul wrote Philippians while he was in prison in Rome. The four “prison epistles” are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Given the theme of the book it is significant that Philippians was written by Paul at a particularly difficult time in his life... while he was in prison.

*“<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. <sup>16</sup>Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.” – Philippians 3:12-16 (NKJV)*

For many years I jogged. I actually loved to get out and go for a run. I told you Sunday, that when I was young I was a sprinter, not a long distant runner, but when I got older I did enjoy jogging. I can’t do it anymore. My knees just won’t let me, and when I try a little... well I pay for it. But for years I jogged, but I’ve never won a race. There are at least three reasons I’ve never won:

- (1) I never entered a race... never ran in a 5k or half-marathon type race. And listen, you don’t win races if you don’t enter them. You can’t win a race if you don’t enter a race.
- (2) I don’t have the attitude it takes to win. Winners are a determined bunch. They set out to not only run, but it’s a competition for them. I ran for pleasure and for health... not to either enter or run a race

with someone. I don't have that kind of mind-set, so I had no desire to race any one. I don't have the attitude it takes to win.

(3) I don't put into my running the kind of determined effort required to win. Winners don't just jog for exercise; they're into it all the way. They read magazines about running; they set goals for themselves; they train and push themselves toward those goals. But I don't work at it as they do.

Now, several times in the New Testament the Christian life is pictured as a race... we talked about one of these on Sunday. Let me give you three passage of Scripture that picture the Christian life as a race:

### **3 New Testament Passage That Picture the Christian Life as a Race:**

- (1) **Hebrews 12:1-2** – *"<sup>1</sup>Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking unto Jesus, the <sup>[a]</sup>author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* \*the one we looked at last Sunday
- (2) **2 Timothy 4:7-8** – *"<sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup>Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."*
- (3) **1 Corinthians 9:24-27** – I love this one... listen close! *"<sup>24</sup>Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. <sup>25</sup>And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. <sup>26</sup>Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. <sup>27</sup>But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."*

In our text the apostle Paul uses that analogy to describe his own spiritual experience. In so doing, he gives us some basic principles for spiritual growth or, to use the athletic analogy, how to get into shape spiritually so that we can run to win the race set before us. Last week we saw the goal of the Christian life (3:10-11): To know Jesus Christ and to be like Him. Christianity is a developing personal relationship with the living Lord Jesus. In Philippians 3:12-16 Paul shows us how to reach this goal through the process of Christian growth. That is what we want to look at this evening as we continue our study through the Paul's letter to the Philippians. So before we get into the heart of Paul's words in Philippians 3:12-16 and talk about "**The Attitude of Those Who Run Toward Joy,**" I want to give you these two kind-of preliminary statements as leads up to what we are saying:

### **2 Foundational Statements for the Race of the Christian Life:**

- (1) **To grow as a Christian you've got to be in the race** – This may sound perfectly obvious, but in reality there are a lot of people trying to run in a race they've never entered. They're trying to grow as Christians by living a good life and doing what Christians are supposed to do, but they've never truly become Christians in the first place.

As we saw in Philippians 3:4-6, Paul himself thought that he was doing everything he needed to do in order to be pleasing unto God. He was sincere; he was dedicated; he was zealous and energetic. But there was one major problem: he was not genuinely converted to Jesus Christ.

Because it's such an important principle and because so many people think that being sincere and trying hard is the way to be right with God, Paul repeats it again in verse 12. Notice it... Paul writes, *"<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."* Notice, Paul is speaking here of his

effort in the Christian race, but he clarifies again that behind his effort is the foundational fact that he was first apprehended by Jesus Christ. The word “lay hold” is an intensified word that means to apprehend or seize something after a pursuit. It is used of a demon seizing a boy and throwing him to the ground (Mark 9:18). If a policeman chased a robber and apprehended him, he would have a firm grip on the man, so as not to let him get away. Paul says that the reason he runs in this race is because Christ Jesus chased him down, seized him, and put him in the race. Think about it! On his part, Paul was headed for Damascus to persecute Christians. But the Lord seized Paul and turned him around so that he began serving Jesus.

The same idea is reflected in verse 14... Paul says, *“<sup>14</sup> I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”* God’s call almost always refers to His effectual calling of His elect unto salvation (Rom. 9:11; 1 Cor. 1:24, 26). We’re saved because God called us to salvation.

To use the sports analogy, it’s as if a coach calls a player to himself and says, “I want you to go into the game.” The player is in the game because the coach has called him into the game. He gives it his best effort to please the coach who called him to play. If you have not been laid hold of by Christ, you’re not in the race.

➔ The Christian life begins not with the weakness of a human decision to follow God, but with God’s powerful, effectual calling you and laying hold of your life. This means that no Christian is his own person; you belong to Jesus Christ who bought you. The reason you’re in the race is because Christ grabbed you and said, “I want you to run for Me.” Because He laid hold of you, you give it all you’ve got. To grow as a Christian, you’ve got to be in the race because Christ laid hold of your life. This is foundational to all else.

(2) **To grow as a Christian you’ve to have the proper attitude and give the proper effort** - Any athlete will tell you that attitude is often the difference between victory and defeat. A team that lacks in raw talent can sometimes defeat a team with much more ability because they have the right attitude going into the game. Attitude is crucial in the spiritual life as well. The Greek word translated “to think” or “be minded” (in Phil.3:15, *“have this mind”*) is used 10 times in Philippians out of 26 New Testament uses.

### **10 Uses of “to think” or “be minded” in Philippians:**

1. **Philippians 1:7** – *“<sup>7</sup> just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.”*
2. **Philippians 2:2** - *“<sup>2</sup> fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”*
3. **Philippians 2:2** - *“<sup>2</sup> fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”*
4. **Philippians 2:5** – *“<sup>5</sup> Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”*
5. **Philippians 3:15** - *“<sup>15</sup> Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.”*
6. **Philippians 3:15** - *“<sup>15</sup> Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.”*
7. **Philippians 3:16** - *“<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same <sup>16a</sup>rule, let us be of the same mind.”*

8. **Philippians 3:19** - <sup>"19</sup> *whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.*"
9. **Philippians 4:2** - <sup>"2</sup> *I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.*"
10. **Philippians 4:10** - <sup>"10</sup> *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.*" \*the same word is actually used twice in this verse and translated as "care"... that brings the number to 11

Since the theme of Philippians is joy, there is a definite correlation between attitude and joy. Two strands of Paul's attitude come through in these verses:

### **2 Strands of Paul's Attitude/Mind/Thinking Concerning Christian Growth:**

1. **He views Christian growth as a lifelong process** - So he has a long-haul attitude
2. **He views Christian growth as the kind of thing where you never can say, "I've arrived"** - So you have to keep moving ahead

Let's look at each of these individually and what they say to us about our own Christian life and growth.

### **THE LONG-HALL ATTITUDE OF THOSE WHO RUN TOWARD JOY: CHRISTIAN GROWTH IS A LIFELONG PROCESS**

Paul had been converted for at least 25 years when he wrote Philippians. There is no question that he is one of the outstanding believers of all times. Yet over and over he reveals his mind-set, that he was still in the process. Notice what he says in our passage in verse 12, <sup>"12</sup> *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*" Did you notice it? He said in the first part of that verse, *"Not that I have already attained..."*, meaning, *"I have not yet come to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings and conformity to His death in a complete and total way."* "I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet" (3:13). Twice he says, "I press on" (3:12, 14); the word literally means to pursue, and by way of extension, to persecute (Paul uses it of himself in this way in 3:6). He's still "reaching forward" (3:13) as a runner stretches toward the finish line. He's been at it for 25 years, but he doesn't view himself as having arrived! The Christian life isn't a 100 yard dash; it's a lifelong marathon. You need the mentality of a long-distance runner if you're going to make it. You may have been a Christian for 40 or 50 years, but you can't start thinking, "I don't need to grow any more" and stop running. Long distance runners have to complete the entire course; they can't decide after many miles that they've run far enough.

This attitude of viewing Christian growth as a lifelong process is crucial for at least two reasons.

### **2 Reasons That Viewing Christian Growth as a Lifelong Process is Important for Christians:**

1. **We all have the human tendency to want quick fixes and easy answers to difficult problems** – We live in this kind of "quick fix" culture, instant cures, fast and easy answers... so we buy into get rich quick schemes, lose weight fast ads, skip the dating and developing a relationship scene and find your match instantly online. We want everything instantly now, right away, no wait. Remember the saying, "Good things come to those who wait!" What does that mean? It doesn't mean to sit and wait and do nothing. It means to be patient, do your homework, grow, build, prepare, be ready when it comes, because the best things are not instant... they take time.

I believe that mentality has even spilled over into the church and in the lives of many professing believers. It is the appeal of the “prosperity preachers” and the “health, wealth and prosperity gospel.” You can have instant success, instant health and healing, instant prosperity with this quick fix... but this handkerchief, send in \$20 dollars to this ministry, but this prayer cloth, say this prayer, get this blessing, just have enough faith, just follow this formula. I would say that many get into the “charismatic movement” because it appeals to this desire for easy answers: “Do you have major problems? What you need is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray over you in tongues, you’ll have an emotional experience and speak in tongues yourself, and you’ll be delivered once and for all from all these tough problems you’re struggling with.” They emphasize instant, miraculous deliverance from any problem. I wish it was that easy! Another form of this teaching is that you need to just “let go and let God.” If you struggle against sin or wrestle with stubborn emotional problems, you’re told that it’s because you’re in the flesh. The implication is that life in the Spirit is effortless and easy once you’ve discovered the secret of “the exchanged life.”

All of these views go against the clear teaching of Scripture, that the spiritual life is a continual battle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. We are instructed to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness (1 Timothy 4:7), which also is an athletic metaphor. There is no quick, easy, instantaneous way to get in top physical conditioning. You have to work at it every day, and the day you stop is the day you start going downhill. Olympic champions who retire do not stay in shape the rest of their lives because of their former training. They have to keep working out all their lives. It is the same spiritually.

### **3 Things that Call for Long Haul Growth in the Christian Life:**

- (1) **Through difficult people believers have to have a long haul growth** - Matthew 10:16-22, *“<sup>16</sup> Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless<sup>as</sup> as doves. <sup>17</sup> But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. <sup>18</sup> You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. <sup>19</sup> But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; <sup>20</sup> for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. <sup>21</sup> Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. <sup>22</sup> And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.”*
- (2) **Through difficult circumstances believers have to have long haul growth** - Matthew 24:3-13, *“<sup>3</sup> Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?’ <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered and said to them: ‘Take heed that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup> For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. <sup>6</sup> And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of sorrows. <sup>9</sup> ‘Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. <sup>10</sup> And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. <sup>11</sup> Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. <sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”*
- (3) **Through spiritual battle believers have to have long haul growth** - Ephesians 6:10-18, *“<sup>10</sup> Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do*

*not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of <sup>1c1</sup>the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup>Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. <sup>14</sup>Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup>and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; <sup>16</sup>above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. <sup>17</sup>And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; <sup>18</sup>praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."*

## 2. It enables us to be gracious and patient with one another –

### **Why do we get impatient, intolerant, annoyed, irritated, exasperated with others? 3 Reasons:**

- (1) **We seek to lower others because of our own insecurities** – Our own insecurities often causes us to be impatient and intolerant of others in our efforts to make ourselves look better and superior to those we are being impatient and annoyed with.
- (2) **We fail to have empathy with others** – Until you've walked in some's shoes you don't and can't really know what someone is going through. So often we quickly judge and condemn others without proper knowledge or empathy of what is going on in their lives and thereby become irritated and annoyed, impatient and even exasperated with others, no really knowing what's going on in their life.
- (3) **We place unreal expectations on others** –

### **Christian Growth as a Lifelong Process is Important for Christians**

The second reason it's important to maintain this long-haul attitude, that Christian growth is a lifelong process, is that it *enables us to be gracious and patient with one another*. Think about it...

*"If you view Christian growth as an instant experience where you're delivered once and for all from all problems, then if you've got problems, obviously it's because you haven't had this experience. So, get with it! Stop having your problems!"*

This view makes us impatient and intolerant toward people who are struggling. But if we remember that growth is lifelong and that even Paul admits that he hasn't arrived after 25 years, we can bear with one another and be gracious to those who are still struggling with problems even after many years of being Christians. The analogy of how we grow as humans is helpful and applicable to us as children of God. It takes years for children to grow to maturity. You don't expect more of them than they're capable of at their stage in life. You expect babies to dirty their diapers and to burp in your face and to cry in the middle of the night. If your teenager is still dirtying his diapers and burping in your face and waking you up with his crying in the night, you've got a problem!

If a brother or sister is growing, we need to be patient and gracious, realizing that it is a lifelong process. We need this long-haul attitude. Spiritually, the important thing to ask yourself is, "Am I actively involved in the growth process?"

## Hymn #62, "All the Way My Savior Leads Me"

Okay, grab a hymn book there in front of you, and turn to hymn #62. This hymn, “All the Way My Savior Leads Me,” is written by the great blind hymn writer, Fanny Crosby who wrote more than 8,000 hymns though blind... one of the most prolific hymnists in history. This song was written about 1875. In Crosby's autobiography, she wrote that this was her first hymn created to be paired with music by Rev. Robert Lowry. The hymn was originally distributed in *Brightest and Best: a choice collection of new songs, duets, choruses, invocation and benediction hymns for the Sunday school and meetings of prayer and praise* in 1875 by the New York publisher Biglow & Main. The syllabic meter is 8.7.8.7.D.

A commonly told story about this hymn recounts that it came to Fanny as a consequence of a prayer. Through financial struggles, she urgently needed some money and as her frequent practice, Fanny started to pray. A few moments following, a gentleman came to her door and promptly donated her the precise amount she needed. Later remembering the event, she said, "I have no way of accounting for this except to believe that God put it into the heart of this good man to bring the money." The poem she wrote afterward became "All The Way My Savior Leads Me".

(1) All the way my Savior leads me: What have I to ask beside?  
Can I doubt His tender mercy, Who through life has been my guide?  
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, Here by faith in Him to dwell!  
For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well;  
For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.

**Questions:**

- **What does this verse say about the long-haul attitude of those who run toward joy?**
- **Do you see any helpful key to Christian growth communicated in this verse?**
- **What does the song say about “doubt” and perhaps defeating doubt in our life?**

(2) All the way my Savior leads me; Cheers each winding path I tread,  
Gives me grace for every trial, Feeds me with the living bread.  
Though my weary steps may falter and my soul a-thirst may be,  
Gushing from the Rock before me, Lo! a spring of joy I see;  
Gushing from the Rock before me, Lo! a spring of joy I see.

**Questions:**

- **What does this verse say about the long-haul attitude of those who run toward joy?**
- **Do you see any helpful key to Christian growth communicated in this verse?**
- **What does the song say about growing “weary” and perhaps what to do when we grow “weary”?**

(3) All the way my Savior leads me; O the fullness of His love!  
Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father's house above.  
When my spirit, clothed immortal, Wings its flight to realms of day,  
This my song through endless ages: Jesus led me all the day;  
This my song through endless ages: Jesus led me all the way.

**Questions:**

- **What does this verse say about the long-haul attitude of those who run toward joy?**
- **Do you see any helpful key to Christian growth communicated in this verse?**

- What does the song say about what we are running toward in the Christian life and perhaps what our focus should be?

### **THE “NOT-HAVING-ARRIVED” ATTITUDE OF THOSE WHO RUN TOWARD JOY: CHRISTIAN GROWTH REQUIRES ALWAYS MOVING AHEAD**

Notice our passage again in Philippians 3:12-16, <sup>12</sup>*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.* <sup>13</sup>*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,* <sup>14</sup>*I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* <sup>15</sup>*Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.* <sup>16</sup>*Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.”* Think of this... if anyone could think he had arrived, it would have been Paul. But he always kept in mind that he wasn't there yet. He didn't want to rest on his laurels or to start coasting. Remember, this is a man who had had numerous visions of the Lord. He had been caught up into heaven and had seen things that no other living person had seen. He had written some of the most profound theology ever penned. But his attitude was, **“I need to keep moving ahead.”** You see this even in his final days, when he was in the dungeon in Rome, and he wrote to Timothy asking him to bring his coat, and then he adds, **“and the books, especially the parchments”** (2 Timothy 4:13). He was facing execution, but he wanted his books so he could keep growing!

➔ In verse 13 of our passage, notice that *“I do”* is in italics, that means (when you see that) that it is not in the original. The brevity of Paul's phrase in Greek makes it more emphatic: “But one thing!” Paul's single attitude of always moving ahead has three ramifications: Forgetting the past, reaching forward to the future, and pressing on in the present.

### **3 Ramifications for Christians Moving Forward in the Faith:**

(1) **We must have an attitude of moving ahead from the past: Leaven it there!** – Notice verses 12 and 13 again, <sup>12</sup>*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.* <sup>13</sup>*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.* Paul spoke of, **“Forgetting what lies behind.”** Again, the picture is of a runner who does not make the mistake of looking over his shoulder. His eyes are fixed on the goal. If he made mistakes earlier in the race, he doesn't kick himself by replaying them in his mind. If he did well, he doesn't gloat about it. He leaves the past behind and keeps moving on toward the finish line.

Many Christians today are being told that to experience healing from their difficult pasts, they need to delve into their pasts and relive the hurtful things that happened to them. This approach has come into the church from the world, not from the Word. It would be wrong to say that verse 13 is all that the Bible says about the past. Even earlier in the chapter, Paul has mentioned his own past life in Judaism. It can be helpful to reflect on what happened to us in the past in order to understand where we're at in the present and where we need to grow. There is a biblical case for self-examination, which means evaluating things that have happened in the past, both good and bad, as a means of growing now. But our text shows that there needs to be a balance.

**How can our past or looking back hinder us in our growth as believers?** \_\_\_\_\_

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Paul means here, I think, that we should not be controlled by the past. Someone has used the analogy of a car's rear view mirror. You don't drive by looking in the mirror. You drive by looking ahead out of the windshield. But it's helpful to take occasional glances in your mirror and use the information to make decisions about how to drive safely in the present and future. But if you spend too much time looking in your mirror, you'll probably crash because you're not paying attention to the present. In the same way, we need to take periodic glances backward, but we also need to put the past (good and bad) behind us, accept God's grace and enabling for the present, and move on with what He is calling us to do now.

- (2) **We must have an attitudes of moving ahead toward the future: Aim for the goal!** – Notice our verses again in verses 12-13, <sup>12</sup> *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.* <sup>13</sup> *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.* Paul speaks of ... *“Reaching forward to what lies ahead”* (3:13). Paul uses a term describing a runner who stretches and strains every muscle as he runs toward the finish line. “The upward call of God” is His call to salvation which culminates when we stand before Him to give an account and receive rewards for how we've run the race. Will our work stand the test and receive His “Well done” because we did it out of love for Him and for His glory? Or, will it be burned up and we be saved, but as through fire (1 Cor. 3:14-15)? Everything we do... how we conduct ourselves in our families and in public; how we spend our time and money; how we serve the Lord... should all be done with the mind-set, “I'm going to stand before the Lord and give an account someday; I want to be pleasing unto Him.”

**What goal are we aiming for and what things may help us in not only aiming for this goal but reaching the goal?** \_\_\_\_\_

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- (3) **We must have an attitude of moving ahead in the present: Keep moving!** – Look at verses 13 and 14 of our passage, <sup>13</sup> *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,* <sup>14</sup> *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.* Did you notice it? Paul says, *“I press on toward the goal”* (3:13-14). Paul had a holy dissatisfaction with where he was, so he kept pressing on. Yesterday's blessings or experiences wouldn't do for today. He walked daily with the Lord, always wanting more, always learning, always growing, never treading water or coasting. In 3:12 Paul says that he is not perfect, but in 3:15 he implies that he and some of his readers are perfect. He isn't contradicting himself within four verses. In 3:12, he means that absolute perfection is not attainable in this life. In 3:15, he uses the word in relative terms to mean “mature” or “growing.” We can become mature, and the mature Christian will share Paul's view that he is setting forth here, that we haven't arrived, but that we can and must keep growing. But Paul recognizes that some will not share his attitude because they are not mature. To those who disagree with him, Paul says, *“Stay teachable and God will show you where you need to grow”* (see 3:15). He adds verse 16 so that no one will mistake him to mean that you can just kick back and not work at growing. He means that wherever you're at, you need to keep living in obedience

to the light God has shown you and keep seeking Him for more. If God has dealt with some sin in your life, don't slip back into it again. If He has cleaned out a dirty closet of your life, don't start throwing junk in there again.

If you want to grow in the Lord, it's essential that you maintain a teachable heart.

**Signs of a Teachable Heart:**

- (1) **A teachable heart is humble** - It admits, "I may be wrong or lacking in understanding; I may need to repent and change."
- (2) **A teachable heart is submissive** – A teachable heart is ready to respond to new light God gives from His Word.
- (3) **A teachable heart is not a know-it-all, refusing to learn from other Christians** -

With that kind of teachable heart, keep moving in the present.

**CONCLUSION**

Dr. Howard Hendricks tells about an elderly Christian woman he knew who would come into a social gathering, where everyone was chit-chatting about nothing significant, and say, "Tell me, Howie, what are the five best books you've read this past year?" Even though she was up in years, she was still actively growing in the Lord. When she died in her nineties, her daughter discovered on her desk that the night before she died in her sleep, she had written out her personal goals for the next five years! Like Paul in prison, right up to the end she wanted to be growing!

I heard about a mountain climber whose epitaph was, "He died climbing." That ought to be true of every Christian.

**Christian Growth Musts:**

1. **If you want grow as a Christian, make sure you're *in the race*** – That is, that Christ has laid hold of your life and saved you from sin.
2. **If you want to grow as a Christian, make sure you have the *right attitude*** – That is, that you haven't arrived, but you're in the lifelong process of moving ahead.
3. **If you want to grow as a Christian, make sure you give it the *proper effort*** – That is, focusing on the goal of being like Christ, and doing everything in light of that high calling.

**Discussion Questions**

1. *How can a person know that Christ has laid hold of him? What are some signs of true conversion?*
2. *How can a Christian know how much (if any) to delve into the past? Do we need to work through "repressed" memories, etc.? Support your answer biblically.*
3. *Should every Christian have clearly defined written goals? Do you suppose Paul did? How can goals help? Can they hinder?*
4. *How can we determine what is God's part and what is our part in the Christian life?*