

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

Rules for the Race

Philippians 3:12-16

1 When you came to the Lord, you were born again and became a new creature, a baby in Christ. 2

Babies have to grow. So do newborn Christians! 3

The Apostle Paul says, Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. 1

God's part in your growth process is to provide you with strength and direction through His indwelling Holy Spirit. Your part in your growth is pictured as a race for a prize. 4 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 2

Progress on your Christian journey to maturity is necessary to keep you from falling away. "Children, come up higher", shouted a dad to his young daughters playing on the beach. The girls were not aware that the tide was rapidly coming up.

¹ I Corinthians 14:20.

² I Corinthians 9:24.

Fortunately, they heard and obeyed him and scrambled up the beach to safety. ⁵

If your part of the growing process is like a race, what are the rules? ⁶

Philippians, chapter 3, verses 12 through 16, tell us.

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, 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, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. ^{3 7}

All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. ^{4 8}

³ Philippians 3:12-14.

⁴ Philippians 3:15-16.

I. Rule # 1 – Don't Think You've Arrived!

– v12-13

Rule # 1: Don't think you've arrived! Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. ⁵ ₉

The Lord said, Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. ¹⁰ Perfect ⁶ in this scripture, means “come to the end”, so, be complete or mature. ¹¹

As a Christian in this life, you are an incomplete person. One year, when the men in our church attended the Promise Keepers conference, we all wore t-shirts with the statement on our chests, “Man Under Construction”. ¹²

So, what are God's resources to help you mature in Christ? ¹³

⁵ Philippians 3:12-13a.

⁶ Τέλειος.

The Lord gave you **elders** (Pastors/Teachers) to equip the saints. That's you! ⁷ ₁₄

The **saints** (that's you) are to do the work of the ministry. ₁₅

The result: for the unity of your church's faith and knowledge of the Son of God. ₁₆ This makes mature, complete people! ₁₇

So, Paul **pressed on**. . . . **but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.** ⁸ He pursued after maturity so he could grasp hold of it! ₁₈

Acts, chapter 9, ⁹ describes the Apostle Paul, named Saul at the time, as a terrorist. He was intent on destroying the Church by killing and arresting every Christian he could find. He was convinced he was doing God's will. On a mission to arrest Christians, he came in contact with the resurrected Jesus. He, then,

⁷ Ephesians 4:11 - It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service . . .

⁸ Philippians 3:12.

⁹ Acts 9:1-19.

realized he was fighting against God instead of for Him! Lord Jesus, in that encounter, grasped hold of Saul which radically changed his life. ¹⁹

So, Paul wanted to grasp hold of his goal of Christian maturity, or completeness, the same way Lord Jesus grasped hold of him at his conversion encounter! ²⁰

II. Rule # 2 – Don't Look Back!

– v13-14

Rule # 2: Don't look back! But one thing I do: 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.

¹⁰
²¹

Lord Jesus said, **No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.** ¹¹ I've been told that when you are plowing, whether it be in a tractor or behind an animal, you must fix your eyes on a landmark straight ahead of

¹⁰ Philippians 3:13-14.

¹¹ Luke 9:62.

you. If you take your eye from your mark, the furrow is crooked at that spot in the field. ²²

Notice Paul's example of this in verses 13 and 14. In verse 13 he forgot his past experiences. ²³ In verse 14 he kept his goal in mind. ²⁴

The writer of the Book of Hebrews adds to this idea. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ¹² ²⁵ What is your incentive?

The Olympic runner strains every muscle to win!

God doesn't reserve the prize for just one person, however. It's for everyone who completes the race!

¹² Hebrews 12:1-2.

God wants you to take your Christian walk seriously. Your incentive for making this Christian journey to maturity is simply to please God!

This reminds me of the story of the young boy who loved his canary. He would enjoy listening to it sing while he did his homework. But his mom became very sick, and the constant singing of the bird made her nervous. Because she knew how much her son loved the canary, she just suffered through it.

When the boy realized how much the canary upset his mom, he gave it and the cage to his friend. Then, he went home and told his mom what he had done. “I loved that canary, mom, but I love you more”, he said. “I decided I didn’t want to keep anything that would hurt you!”¹³

Shouldn’t that be your incentive for growing in your Christian life?²⁶

But notice **the prize.²⁷**

¹³ Our Daily Bread.

To the ancient Olympian runner it was a perishable wreath. ²⁸

To the modern Olympian runner it's a gold, silver, or bronze medal. ²⁹

But to you, it is the high calling, the status God was called you to become! ³⁰

III. Rule # 3 – Don't Quit!

– v15-16

Rule # 3: don't quit! All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. ¹⁴

³¹

In verse 15, we are to **continue to seek God's direction in your life through God's Word.** Hebrews, chapter 6, verse 1, **Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity . . .** ¹⁵ ³²

¹⁴ Philippians 3:15-16.

¹⁵ Hebrews 6:1.

The word **mature** in verse 15 and **maturity** in Hebrews 6, verse 1 are the same word as **be perfect** in Matthew 5, verse 48! ¹⁶ ₃₃

In the Matthew passage, the Lord tells you to become mature in your life. ₃₄

The Hebrews passage tells you how to become mature in your faith. ₃₅

Then, in verse 15 here, it tells you to continue on your journey to maturity even though you may be more mature than others! ₃₆

In verse 16, **let your life radiate your maturity of faith in your conduct!**

Have you ever been devastated emotionally when someone you respected for their maturity fell from your pedestal? ₃₇

¹⁶ All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. -v15 Hebrews 6:1 - Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity . . . Matthew 5:48 - Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

How does this relate to spiritual warfare? 38

The Christian journey is a constant struggle. 39

The Holy Spirit encourages and gives you strength. 40

Satan puts temptations in your path. 41

You decide who wins! 42

Where are you on your spiritual journey? Are you growing in your faith, or just existing?

Get into the Word! Follow the godly examples of more mature Christians! 43

And “let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds & praise your Father in heaven”.

17

<http://biblelifemessages.org/>

¹⁷ Matthew 5:16.