

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**January 27, 2013**

**The Upward Call in Jesus Christ**

Read Philippians 3:12-16

**Key verse: “The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).**

As followers of Jesus Christ, our lives should be a continual pursuit of “God’s upward call in Christ Jesus.” The Apostle Paul describes this goal in Philippians 3, and the goal might be summarized this way: to *know* Christ, to be *like* Christ, and to be all that Christ wants us to be.

Are you giving all you have to pursue that goal? No one can win this “prize” without huge doses of *grace*. But, at the same time, no one can win the prize without a daily commitment to this pursuit: to know Christ, to be like Christ, and to be all that Christ wants you to be. “No steam or gas drives anything until it is confined,” said Harry Emerson Fosdick. “No life ever grows great until it is focused, dedicated, disciplined.”

“I haven’t reached the goal yet,” someone laments. Paul would understand. “It’s not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it....” (v. 12). Paul was saying, “I’m by no means a complete Christian, but I am forever pressing on toward the goal!” It’s OK to realize you’re not there yet. Just don’t give up the pursuit!

The Christian life is a life under continual construction. Poet and writer Ruth Graham Bell was the wife of evangelist Billy Graham. She said: “I saw a sign on a strip of highway once that I would like to have copied on my gravestone. It read, *End of construction. Thank you for your patience.*”

We are called to pursue the goal of God’s upward call—to know Christ, to be like Christ, and to be all that Christ wants us to be. This is not a passive or half-hearted pursuit. Paul writes, “I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose” (v. 12). Every follower of Christ has been grabbed by Christ for some great purpose. It should be the goal of life to discover what that purpose is and live to fulfill it! We are called to live life *on purpose*.

Paul adds another beautiful thought to his description of the holy pursuit: “I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of

me” (v. 13). We can’t effectively pursue the upward call of God in Christ if we dwell on either *past sins and failures* or on *past achievements and successes*.

Paul surely had his share of past sins. He was, you’ll remember, at one time the chief persecutor of the Christian movement, even holding the coats of those who were stoning Stephen to death. (See Acts 7:54 – 8:3.) But the new Paul, his past sins now covered by the blood of Jesus, refused to let guilt hold him back from pursuing the upward call of God in Christ. Paul also refused to dwell on his past achievements and successes.

“It is a mistake to be always turning back to recover the past,” wrote F.B. Meyer. “The law for Christian living is not backward, but forward; not for experiences that lie behind, but for doing the will of God, which is always ahead and beckoning us to follow. Leave the things that are behind, and reach forward to those that are before....Look up, press forward, the best is yet to be!” That is an important word for every Christian and for every church.

“I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus.” The Greek word translated “reach out” here is a word used to describe a runner in a race, going hard for the tape, straining for the finish line. Such should be our pursuit of “the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus.”

Dennis Rainey shared the following account of Olympic athlete Brian Clay:

*As an eight-year boy growing up in Hawaii, Brian Clay dreamed of winning one of the most prized gold medals in the Olympic games—the decathlon. He accomplished that goal in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.*

*In the decathlon, athletes earn points for their mark in ten events over two days. With a commanding lead going into the last event, the 1500-meter run, Clay could have just coasted to the finish line and still earned the gold medal. But when Clay was asked when he knew he had the decathlon wrapped up, he surprised me with his reply:*

*“In the last race when I was about 10 feet away from the finish line—that’s when I knew I’d won. I’d worked, trained, and competed for eight years to be able to have the gold medal hanging around my neck. And if there was anything those eight years of competition had taught me it was that in competing against the best in the world in ten grueling events, anything can go wrong before you cross the finish line.”*

*I’ve never competed in the Olympics, but I have competed in life. Like Brian Clay, I’ve learned that the race isn’t over until you cross the finish line. Even in the very last years of life—just short of the finish line—you can continue to be used by God. People still need you. You can still have an impact (from an article in “Family Life”).*

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**“It’s not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose. Brothers and sister, I myself don’t think I’ve reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. The goal I pursue is the prize of God’s upward call in Christ Jesus. So all of us who are spiritually mature should think this way....”**

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