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**Series:** Philippians: Growing in Christ

**Date:** July 3, 2022

**Speaker:** Pastor Josh Jones, *Community Life Pastor*

**Text:** Philippians 3:12-21

**Title:** Christian Grit and the Sovereignty of God

Good Morning Mercy Church! Happy 4th of July weekend. If you are New to Mercy, welcome, I'm glad you're here and I look forward to getting to meet you. Like Jake said, my name is Josh Jones and I just want to share with you how blessed my family and I have been to be here worshiping with you whether here or at our Northeast Campus over the past 6 months. We've loved getting to know you, serve with you and worship with you. We are so excited that God has brought our family here and we are excited for all He has in store.

I know there are a lot of you that I still haven't met yet, so I thought I'd share a little about me and my family. First of all, something I think you should know, I'm an Aggie... I was born in New Jersey, spent a few years in Southern California, and then really grew up in Plano Texas just north of Dallas. After I graduated college I went through a discipleship program at a Church in Denton and that's where I met my wife. I've been married to my wife Ashley for 15 years and man, we have been so thankful to be able to experience God together. We've walked through some hard things and we've walked through some really good things together, and through all of it, we've been able to see God's faithfulness. We never

could have imagined the journey God has taken us on and we are so thankful for all the different ways we've been able to see God work in our lives. We have three kids. Our daughter Ivy is 14 and about to go into high school, and we have twin boys Hudson and Caleb who are 10.

I grew up in a family of runners and over time it has become something that I've really grown to love. It's a way for me to stretch my legs, clear my mind, and pray for whatever is on my heart. We recently moved here from Clemson, and in Clemson, we literally lived right next to about 60 miles of hiking trails. I used to love to get lost in them and it sort of put a bug in me for trail racing. So I started looking into trail races nearby and I found one at Table Rock state park, close to where we used to live. Listen to the description... (I promise this is heading somewhere).

*"Roots and rocks; hills and creeks; views and memories... We offer them all and more at Table Rock Ultras. Your goal... is the finish line, but lying between you and that goal is a lot of climbing, creek crossing, rock-hopping, gel-taking, and limit-pushing."*

Whose in? Does that get you going?! Like I'm ready to sign up today! Lets GO right?! Some of you are shaking your head "No" but others of you... I see you (nodding yes). I love the description of this race. One of the reasons I admire people who do races like this and why



I'd like to myself, is because I see so many parallels between endurance sports and the Christian life.

This morning we are going to be in Philippians 3:12-21, and Paul is going to use a race analogy like he does so often to help us think about the Christian life. This portion of Paul's letter reads to me a little like a pep talk from a coach. So, I've tried to outline it to reflect what a coach might say to us as we would prepare to run the race that God has set before us.

So the 3 points of my outline are this  
Run towards the Goal (12-17)  
Run your race (18-19)  
Expect to win (20-21)

### 1. Run towards the Goal (Phil. 3:12-17)

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. Philippians 3:12 (CSB)

So, what's the GOAL? The GOAL is his target. It's what he's aiming for; as a runner, it's the Finish line. If you were here with us two weeks ago, you probably remember what Paul said his goals were.

1. To know Jesus
2. To know the power of his resurrection

3. To know the fellowship of his suffering
4. To be conformed to his death
5. Reach the resurrection from among the dead.

Probably not what you came up with for your New Year's resolutions. Bottom line, Paul's goal in life was to know Jesus. He believed that knowing Him fully was the greatest treasure he could ever receive. He was willing to do whatever it took. And he ran with a sense of humility knowing that he had not yet reached his goal and that he never would fully attain his goal this side of heaven, but he still reached for it.

In verse 12 when he talks about perfection... he's not using the word "perfect" in the same way that you and I typically understand "perfect" to mean. He's really trying to communicate this idea of completeness. He is striving, running towards this goal of completeness in Christ knowing that it will only be fully realized in heaven, and then he goes on to say that the only reason he can take hold of it (this goal) is because Christ has taken hold of him!

So if we are going to run towards the goal of knowing Jesus and becoming like Him, we are going to have to become okay with holding a couple things in tension.

It's going to take some **Grit... Resolve**. You are going to have to be determined to pursue becoming complete in Christ because you know that true life is only found in Him. Do you get what I mean by



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Grit? Grit is when you determine to trust God more than your own understanding because you know that your obedience to Him is what's best for you and those around you.

**Grit** is being willing to consider others before yourself even when you're tired and need a break.

**Grit** is being determined to love your spouse and your kids even when it feels hopelessly difficult.

**Grit** is turning down a lucrative opportunity that you know will lead you to compromise your faith and the way God would have you live in this world.

**Grit** requires that you have the humility to let people speak openly and honestly into your life for your good.

**Grit** is trusting God enough to tell someone close to you your sorry and being willing to extend true forgiveness.

**Grit** is being intentional to open the scriptures each day to remind yourself of God's love for you and your need for Him.

You are going to have to have Grit.

And... You are going to have to trust and rest in the **sovereignty of God**. What I mean is that you are going to have to trust that God is all powerful and that **He rules and reigns over all things**. Which means, He rules and reigns over your life. Isn't that amazing to think about? That our all powerful creator, who holds the world in His hands, also cares enough about the details of your life and my life so

much so that He is faithful to carry us through the highs and lows of life as we strain physically, emotionally, and spiritually to reach the prize of heaven.

And it's not just that He is going to carry you through the highs and lows but it is through the highs and lows of life that He is conforming you to His image. Isn't that great news that God is at work even in the most difficult of circumstances?

We have to be ok with the tension that exists between Grit and God's sovereignty. We have to be able to hold them together.

Paul is literally running after Jesus, with everything he has, and at the same time, he's acknowledging that the only way he will achieve this goal is through the sustaining grace of God. He can take hold of it because God has taken hold of him.

Maybe this will help illustrate what I'm talking about. A few weeks ago, my family and I got to spend a week at the beach. My kids are getting older and love swimming out into the waves. One of my sons was determined to swim out past where the waves were breaking just to float and feel your body rise and fall as the waves came in. Well, we made it out there, and the waves were getting a little rougher than we anticipated and the undertow was pretty strong so we decided to head back to shore. As we were coming in we got caught where the waves were crashing, one after another after



another. It started to feel like every time you ducked under one wave you had a split second to catch your breath before you had to duck under the next. Each time a wave would come, I'd look to make sure my son's head would pop up and that he wasn't getting washed away (Sounds like a fun trip right?). It took everything my son had to try and make it to shore. Well one wave came that I saw while my son was still recovering from the last one and I was able to grab him around the waist just before the wave would have knocked him over. I was able to carry him through it. We got knocked around under the water, but we were together and we made it to the shore.

We were fine. My son struggled and fought to get to the shore “**Grit**” but I was with him and I got him there “**Sovereignty**”.

Grit and Sovereignty, how the two work in tandem together is a mystery to me, but I think this is what Paul is getting at in Philippians 2 when he tells them to work out their salvation but to do it knowing that it is God who is at work within them to will and to work according to his good pleasure (Phil 2:13).

Alright, let's jump back into verse 13. Now Paul is going to get into a little strategy to help us stay focused and reach the goal.

**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, 14 I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 3:13-14 (CSB)**

So, how does Paul model or illustrate what pursuing this prize should look like?

1. Paul tells us to forget what is behind.
2. Reach forward to what is ahead.

First: “**Forget what's behind**”

...Here's why I think this is so important to reaching the goal. So many of us are frozen by our past, whether past successes or failures. If we're not careful we can think our past failures will define our future and as a result cause us to live with a feeling of hopelessness. We can look at our shortcomings, and entrapments and think there will never be a way out for us. I want to encourage you for a minute, if this describes you, you're not alone. All throughout the scriptures God uses the most unlikely people to accomplish his kingdom work. Throughout the scriptures, time and time again, God proves that he came not for those who thought they had their life together but for those who knew their life had fallen apart. If you feel stuck, entrapped and without hope, then you are in good company, because apart from Christ, this describes all of us. This is exactly why Jesus came. He came because we couldn't fix our past or right our future. Maybe you're in here this morning burdened by your past and feeling hopeless about your



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future. The message that God has for you is one of rescue and hope. Hope that your past does not have to define you anymore.

Now I want to acknowledge the fact that some of you are thinking “What if I can’t forget?” For some, past traumas are too much and it would be unhelpful for me to say to you just forget. Paul is not suggesting that you should be able to just turn that off. What you need to know is that God is gentle in his approach. In Isaiah 42:3 the prophet looks forward to the arrival of Jesus... listen to how he describes him he writes...

He will not break a bruised reed,  
and he will not put out a smoldering wick;  
he will faithfully bring justice. -- Isaiah 42:3 (CSB)

Think about this for a moment, our all powerful God knows how to approach us small finite creators with tenderness and care and nurture us back to life. A bruised reed He will not break, a smoldering wick... with just a flicker of flame... He will not put out.

Our Heavenly Father sent his son to come to earth, to pick us up, dust us off and remind us that we are not alone and that He is here to set us on a better course and to help us finish the race.

**Now, we also can’t rest in our past successes** and think that future

growth will happen on its own. Some of you might remember Usain Bolt. He is known as the world’s fastest man. Now it is a huge deal to make it to the Olympics. it’s an even bigger deal to win a medal especially a gold medal, and it is a much bigger deal to set a world record. Do you know how many times Usain Bolt set a world record in the 100 M?

Between 2008 and 2009, he broke the men's 100m world record three times. That means he beat his own world record two times! And his record (9.58) stands unbeaten today. So again, most people would be happy to just make it to the olympics, to medal would be amazing, but if you set a world record, you probably could just think about retiring. But he didn't, he kept racing, he kept getting faster. Had he stopped racing, he would have stopped growing. He would have never reached his full potential as a sprinter.

How many of us find ourselves content to rest in the past “victories”? At some point it just becomes silly. You don’t want to be the guy who shows up somewhere, 50 yrs old, still wearing your highschool letter jacket. Talk about peeking early right? Even in our walk with Jesus we can find ourselves stagnant only reminiscing about mission trips we took in the past or passages of scripture we used to have memorized. Or ways we used to be intentional to share our faith, or ways we used to be dependent upon God to show up in our lives. We could go on and on.



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Paul warns us here not to let our past failures or our past victories stop us from staying focused on the Goal. So you see, the past is helpful to reflect on, but it is only helpful to the extent that it helps us reach forward to what is ahead. It's not good for us to stay in the past. We have to like Paul says, **Forget what's behind, and "Reach forward to what is ahead"**. We have to keep moving, striving for growth in Christ. We keep seeking to know Jesus to be conformed to his image. This is what it is to be a follower of Jesus. Paul says this intense pursuit is actually a sign of Maturity. Because those who are maturing in Christ want more of Jesus.

In verse 17, Paul lets us in on one more strategy that I don't want us to miss.

**17 Join in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and pay careful attention to those who live according to the example you have in us. --Philippians 3:17 (CSB)**

He says follow my example, and follow the example of others running like me. We need to be intentional to run this race with others who have the same goal in mind. This shouldn't surprise us. Any of you who have set big goals before know that one of the keys to accomplishing them is surrounding yourself with people who are going to encourage and support you. This is how God set up the Christian life. Our walk with Christ was never intended to be done in

isolation, but in the context of community. That's one of the reasons we make such a big deal out of Community Groups. These are places where we can meet regularly with other believers, encourage one another through our shared devotion to Christ, and we can serve each other through Sacrificial Love. So, running hard after Jesus means that we have to surround ourselves with the right examples to follow.

So running towards the goal, means that we are seeking to Know Jesus and to be like Him. And we do that by:

1. Forgetting what's behind.
2. Reaching forward to what's ahead. (This is our new Finish Line)
3. Following the right examples.

## **2. Run your Race (Phil. 3:18-19)**

Next, we have to Run our race... I know it sounds a little individualistic but what It means is stick to your training. When runners train, especially your longer distance runners, they learn their bodies and the pace they need to hold at various points throughout the race to be able to finish with their fastest time or achieve a new Personal Record. Any runner's temptation will be to become distracted by the pace of those running around them. And if they start out too fast, or too slow, they hurt their ability to win.



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As followers of Jesus, we have to train. We run the race that God has set before us, and we know that distractions are going to come. But our training... time in the scriptures and prayer, being meaningfully engaged with a body of believers, engaging in a community group... These things God has given us to help us keep our focus on Him and to know how to respond to distractions when they come up. This is so important because the danger is that we will get off course following our passions rather than following Jesus.

Look at what Paul writes in verse 18.

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; and they are focused on earthly things. -- Philippians 3:18-19 (CSB)

There is a warning in these verses for us, as well as an example to follow. Paul warns the Philippians of the heart-breaking reality that there are those all around them who stand as enemies of the Cross. Notice the emotion here, he is in tears as he writes this to them. Paul doesn't speak of these enemies of the cross as outsiders to be avoided, but as people who are missing out on Jesus, and as a result, they serve their passions as god. Paul's heart breaks for them, and their heart should break for them. So the question for us is, *Does our heart break for those around us who are chasing after anything and everything other than God to provide for them what*

*only God can give them?* If it doesn't, maybe it's because we also are consumed by earthly things.

This can happen to Christians too. Even those of us who know life can only be found in Jesus we can still **find ourselves looking to creation to give us what can only come from The Creator**. When we do this, it leaves us feeling empty and dissatisfied.

Our flesh lusts after sex, money, pleasure, fame, food, entertainment and when we partake in these outside of the context they were created for, we never experience the blessing they were intended to give and it leaves us feeling hollow and empty.

I heard a friend once talk about sin and temptation as chocolatey chains. I thought that was such a good analogy. Sin looks so good in the moment and it's such a distraction that we don't even realize that while we are indulging we are becoming enslaved; We become its prisoner and servant.

We all know what this is like. We've all experienced the entrapment of sin. We've all felt the despair and hopeless feeling we get when we try to rescue ourselves. We can't do it. And the amazing rescuing news of Jesus is only beautiful to us when we come face to face with our inability to fix ourselves. You can't do it. You never will. But God sees you. God sees humanity and out of love he sent his son Jesus to earth to rescue us from what we could never save ourselves from.



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And when he does, he reorients the trajectory of our lives and gives us a vision for a new GOAL. A GOAL that is not set low upon earthly things but one that turns our eyes towards Heaven.

So let's stop just for a moment and do a little self evaluation. Where are you in your race? Have you gotten distracted with earthly things that lead to destruction, or are you running hard after Jesus with everything you have, surrounding yourselves with others who are aspiring to do the same?

What steps do you need to take today to make sure you are running towards the right finish line? Is there someone you need to talk to? It's so easy for us to find ourselves off pace, or even off course because we have taken our eyes off of the goal, we've taken our eyes of Jesus and placed them on something else. When this happens we have to simply stop, get back on course and set our vision to the proper goal. Looking to Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-2 also talks about the Christian faith as a race.

1 Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, 2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross,

despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. -- Hebrews 12:1-2 (CSB)

Lay aside every hindrance, Get rid of the things that turn your eyes and your heart away from Jesus, Don't get distracted, Run the race with endurance.

Think about runners, how do they dress for a race? They wear the skimpiest outfits because they want to get rid of any extra weight, anything that might hinder them from achieving their best race.

Similarly we need to rid ourselves of anything that is hindering us from following Jesus.

KEEPING... your eyes on Jesus... This is your focus... This was Paul's goal... to know Christ and to be conformed to his image... This is our Goal as believers. And notice the end.

It was for the joy set before Jesus that He endured the Cross for you, and He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God... That's a picture of victory... Jesus defeated sin and death and made a way for us to be restored back into a right relationship with Him. This brings us to our last point.

**3. Expect to win (Phil. 3:20-21)**

These last two verses are just dripping with hope. Let's read.





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20 Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21 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.

Citizenship in heaven:

If you are in Christ, you can know that you will reach the goal at the end of your race. Those who are in Christ are citizens of heaven. This is an idea that the Philippians understood really well. They were in Philippi, a Roman colony, and their citizenship was in Rome. So Paul picking up on this says, look you are in Philippi but your citizenship is in heaven. You are a part of God's Family. And you know what, your Savior is coming back for you.

And listen to what he is going to do for you... *21 He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, and he is going to do it by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.*

So our sovereign God redeems us and sets us on a course to run the race that He has set before us, He lifts our eyes to a prize unimaginably better than anything this world has to offer. The prize is Himself in all His infinite wisdom and glory, and He promises to make us like Him. He is the source of every living thing, and in Him and Him alone will we find ourselves complete.

As we close our time, I want to leave you with this.

On this race that God has set you on, there will be roots and rocks, hills and creeks, views and memories. You will experience them all as you reach forward towards the prize of Christ Jesus in heaven. Your goal... is the finish line, but lying between you and that goal is a lot of climbing, creek-crossing, rock-hopping, gel-taking, and limit-pushing. But rest assured that those who are in Christ will finish the race because He has taken hold of you in His sovereign all-powerful hand that enables Him to subject everything to Himself. Will it require grit? Yes, it will require a lot of it. But God in his grace will get you there. So **run towards the goal, run your race according to your training, and expect to win.**

Pray.