

**The Ultimate Endgame**  
**Philippians 3:12-4:1**  
**Part 7—Choose Joy**

**Introduction**

Billy Graham's worldwide evangelism ministry spanned more than sixty years. Before he passed away, Billy was invited to speak at a luncheon in North Carolina. After many wonderful things were said about him, Billy stepped to the podium and said.

*"I'm reminded today of Albert Einstein, the great physicist who this month has been honored by Time Magazine as the Man of the Century. Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of every passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached into his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached into his pant pockets. It wasn't there, so he looked in his briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat beside him. He still couldn't find it.*

*The conductor said, 'Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.' Einstein nodded appreciatively. The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket.*

*The conductor rushed back and said, 'Dr. Einstein, don't worry, I know who you are. No problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.' Einstein looked at him and said, 'Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I am going?'"*

Billy Graham continued. *"See the suit I'm wearing? It's a brand-new suit. My family has been telling me I've gotten a little sloppy in my old age. I used to be more fastidious. So, I went out and bought a new suit for this luncheon and one more occasion. You know what that occasion is? This is the suit in which I'll be buried. But when you hear I'm dead, I don't want you to remember the suit I'm wearing. What I want you to remember is this: I not only know who I am...but I also know where I am going."*

Perhaps the greatest blessing of being a Christ follower is having the assurance of eternal life. This is the ultimate endgame. The last time I checked the mortality rate among humans is running a solid 100%. Every single one of us, at some point, will pass from this life into eternity. The Bible says this life is like a vapor.

Someone once said if you stretched a rope across the Pacific Ocean from Costa Rica to Japan, our time on earth would account for only the first inch of that rope. The rest would represent eternity. In other words, the vast majority of our existence won't be spent here. It will be spent in eternity. So, it behooves us to have some answers about what will happen in eternity.

Once again, this is one of the blessings of being a Christ follower. Jesus said he was going to prepare a place for us in heaven. And Jesus told us that he himself was the way to get there. "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

So, Jesus is preparing a place in heaven and he's the only way to get there. Jesus also said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36)

In other words, believing in Christ is the only way to secure our place in heaven. The most well-known verse in the Bible is John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Because of God's great love for every human being, he sent his Son—Jesus—on a rescue mission. Jesus lived a sinless life. Because he never sinned, Jesus could die in our place to pay the penalty for our sin. He took upon himself the punishment we deserved so we would not have to live eternally separated from God.

But to receive this gift of God's grace, to reserve our place in heaven, we have to believe in what Christ did for us. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

The Bible makes it very clear that by placing our faith in the finished work of Christ, we become children of God (John 1:12), our name is written in the book of life (Revelation 20:15) and we're given the gift of the Holy Spirit as a deposit to guarantee our future place in heaven (Ephesians 1:14).

So, the ultimate endgame is where we end up in eternity. Billy Graham knew where he was going. He was totally confident that he had a place reserved in heaven. Dr. Graham based his confidence on the finished work of Christ which he personally received by faith and then preached to millions around the globe.

This is also part of Paul's focus in our passage in Philippians. This is the seventh message in our journey through this amazing New Testament letter. We've called this series: Choose Joy because over and over again joy bubbles up. No other truth inspires more joy for Christ-followers than heaven! I can't wait to be with the Lord in a place that has no more tears, no more pain and no more disappointment! Today we consider Philippians 3:12-4:1. Would you follow along in your message notes?

<sup>12</sup> Not 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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

*15 All of us, then, 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. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

*17 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18 For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

*4:1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!*

In this passage Paul refers to the ultimate endgame at least seven times. Let's look at each one briefly.

1. The first reference is in verse 12: *“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal...”* This refers back to the previous verse when Paul mentions his desire to know Christ and to attain *“the resurrection from the dead.”* Obviously, Paul has not yet been resurrected from the dead. He's still in process looking forward to the final consummation of his salvation.

The Bible speaks about salvation on three different levels: past, present and future. On November 25, 1975 I became a Christ follower. That happened in the past. That was the date when I accepted Jesus as my Lord. I was forgiven and my name was written in the book of life. Theologically this is called regeneration.

But since that time, for the past 47 years, God's work has continued in me. He's been cleaning me up step by step. This is the present ongoing work of salvation. Theologically, this is referred to as sanctification.

There will come a day, however, when I will become perfect...like Jesus. 1 John 3:2. *“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But when he appears, we shall be like him for we shall see him as his is.”* This is the final step in the salvation process. It's when God makes us perfect like Jesus so we're fit for heaven. This final step is theologically known as glorification.

2. A second reference to the ultimate endgame is also found in verse 12. Notice the final phrase: *“I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”* Why did Christ take hold of us? Why did he leave heaven, come to earth and die on the cross? Jesus did all that to make us like himself and take us to heaven! In John 14:3 Jesus says, *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take*

*you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*” Jesus wants to take us with him to heaven! How cool is that?

3. A third reference to the ultimate endgame is in the final phrase of verse 13: “straining toward what is ahead.” Paul is looking ahead to the finish line. He knows one day he’ll be made like Christ. Until then, he’s straining ahead in that direction. He’s focused on crossing the final tape in the race of life. This is the consummation of our salvation; the joy of being in God’s presence.
4. A fourth reference to the ultimate endgame is in verse 14: “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Paul uses the imagery of a track race. But the prize, in this case, is the most precious gift we could ever receive...the gift of sharing eternity with Christ.

People all around us are chasing after all kinds of things: more money, more sex, more pleasure, more toys, more trips, more stuff. A few years ago, Pastor Erwin McMannus wrote a powerful book called *Soul Cravings*. In it he talks about the insatiable human desire to find significance. Far too often we look in all the wrong places to find meaning and purpose. In contrast, Paul’s eyes are laser-focused on the ultimate endgame: the prize of being made like Christ & being with him forever.

5. A fifth reference to the ultimate endgame is in verse 20: “Our citizenship is in heaven.” Two of our children, Jennifer and Tommy, were born in Chile while we were missionaries. As a result, they had dual citizenship. They were citizens of both the United States and Chile. When we traveled as a family, we carried two passports for them: one from the USA and one from Chile.

But a day came when their Chilean citizenship lapsed. When Jennifer and Tommy turned 18 their Chilean citizenship ended and they became solely citizens of the USA. In a similar way, right now every Christ follower has dual citizenship. We’re citizens of the earth and we’re also citizens of heaven. But one day our dual citizenship will end. Our earthly citizenship will lapse and the one that will remain will be our citizenship in heaven.

6. A sixth reference to the ultimate endgame is also found in verse 20: “And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...” “From there” refers to heaven. Romans 8:34 says Jesus *“is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”* Right now, Jesus is in heaven praying for us.

But the day will come when he will return to earth! Listen to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will be with the Lord forever.”* This is known as the Rapture. Those who believe in Jesus at the Second Coming will be caught up to meet him in the clouds and be with him forever.

7. A seventh and final reference to the ultimate endgame is in verse 21. The Lord will “transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” I referred to this earlier. This is the final step in the process of salvation: the glorification of our bodies when the Lord will make us perfect like him.

Thus, this entire passage is filled with references to the ultimate endgame: becoming perfect like Christ and being with Jesus forever. Now I know that sometimes Christians have been so heavenly minded they’ve been no earthly good. That’s not what God wants. We need balance. God is also concerned about things like justice, helping the poor and reaching the lost.

But CS Lewis put it this way. “If we aim at heaven, we get the earth thrown in. But if we aim at the earth, we will miss both.” Paul’s passion in our passage is unmistakable. He’s relentless in his pursuit of the ultimate endgame to be made perfect like Christ and to be with the Lord forever.

Look at all the ways Paul expresses his passion. You might circle each one of these words or phrases in your message notes....

- In verse 12 he writes, “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” Pressing on implies intentionality, discipline and persistence.
- In verse 13 he says, “one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind...” The Greek term forgetting means fully forgetting; completely forgetting. This means fully letting go of the past in order to fully embrace the ultimate endgame.
- Also, in verse 13 “straining toward what is ahead...” Straining means applying intense physical and mental effort in the pursuit of Christ-likeness and preparing for heaven.
- Now look at verse 14. “I press on toward the goal...” This is the same term found in verse 12. Pressing on means pressing on toward the goal to finish well.
- In verse 17 Paul says to, “join together in following my example...” Circle that. Paul’s passionate pursuit to become like Christ is an example for us. We’re to take note of those who live with this passion and follow them.
- In verse 18 he again warns with tears about false teachers. These false teachers live as enemies of the cross because they teach a works-based salvation. The cross represents God’s grace. The true gospel is salvation by Christ alone through faith alone.

We mentioned last week that these false teachers were known as Judaizers. They taught that a person had to keep the Jewish law, in addition to embracing Christ, to be saved. That’s why Paul says in verse 19 “their god is their stomach and...their mind is on earthly things.” Bottom line: be careful. Don’t get

sidetracked with incorrect doctrine. Be passionate about the most important things like pursuing Christ and preparing for heaven.

- In verse 20 Paul writes, “we eagerly await a Savior...” Paul is longing for the day when Jesus returns. Like a kid waiting to open presents on Christmas morning, Paul can’t wait to see Jesus face to face and be made like him.
- Finally in 4:1. “*Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*” Standing firm means not moving, not retreating. Holding our ground for Christ is an important way we can express our passion for Jesus.

Thus, we see in our text Paul’s passionate pursuit of the ultimate endgame. He has a white-hot desire to become like Christ and be prepared for heaven. But now I’d like to ask you this question:

- How do you pursue these things yourself?
- How do you develop in Christ-likeness?
- How do you grow spiritually and prepare for eternity?
- Each of us is different. Each of us connects with God in different ways. So how are you wired to pursue the prize God has prepared for you?

I think it’s important to recognize that each of us has a different spiritual pathway for how we perceive God’s presence and experience spiritual growth. One size does not fit all with regard to how we grow spiritually. But we all have one or two spiritual pathways that fit us best.

Pastor John Ortberg writes, “There is enormous freedom in identifying and embracing your spiritual pathway. It is a little like realizing that if you’re an introvert, you don’t have to work as a salesman; you could get a job in a library. You don’t have to beat yourself up or feel guilty because of what is not your pathway. You can focus on relating to God in that way for which you were made...”

Let me suggest a number of Pathways to connect with God.

- Intellectual Pathway-Some people draw closer to God as they learn more about him. These folks love ideas and theology. They love to study Scripture. When these folks are in small groups, they’re the ones pushing to study the deep things about God.
- Relational Pathway-These people have their greatest sense of God’s presence when they’re involved in significant relationships. These are the folks in small groups who want to sit and talk and hold hands and sing kumbya.
- Serving Pathway-Some people experience God’s presence most when they’re helping others. These are the folks in small groups who are always pushing to

serve meals to the homeless. They connect with God best when they're doing something tangible for the Lord.

- Worship Pathway-These folks love to connect with God with music, the arts and praise. Some of you may wonder why you don't get as excited as Lucho when you're in a worship service. Well, chances are there's nothing wrong with you. It may simply be that musical worship is not one of your primary spiritual pathways. That's okay—we're all different—as long as you find the way God has designed you to connect with him.
- Contemplative Pathway-People who connect with God in this way need large blocks of time alone. God is most present to these folks when all the distractions are removed. I think I have a strong contemplative streak in me. One of the ways I connect best with God is when I'm alone with the Lord on my patio.
- Creation Pathway-These folks connect with God by experiencing the majesty of his creation. I think this is why I enjoy hiking and backpacking. I'm one of those people who feel like being out-of-doors is a spiritual experience. I connected with God in some special ways when I climbed Chirripó a few weeks ago.

Each of us is different. Which spiritual pathway helps you connect with God most?

Now look back at our passage. Look back at "press on" in verse 12. Look at "forgetting what is behind" and "straining toward what is ahead" in verse 13. Now look at "press on" in verse 14.

- Do these terms describe how you pursue your spiritual life?
- Are you pressing on?
- Are you straining toward what is ahead?

We all have different spiritual pathways to connect with God and grow. But none of the pathways help unless we stay focused.

### **Conclusion**

The Taj Mahal is one of the most beautiful and costly tombs ever built. In 1629 the favorite wife of the Indian ruler Shah Jahan died. He ordered a magnificent tomb to be built as her memorial. The shah placed his wife's casket in the middle of a parcel of land and construction of the temple began around it.

But several years into the venture, the shah's grief for his wife gave way to his passion for the project. One day while he was surveying the sight, he stumbled over a wooden box and he had some workers throw it out. It was months before he realized that they had tossed out his wife's casket. Sadly, the original purpose for the memorial got lost in the details of the construction.

Don't let that happen with your spiritual life.

- What can you do to press ahead with more focus this week?

- Do you need to turn off the TV?
- Do you need to say no to something so you have time to focus on the Lord?
- Do you need to make yourself accountable to someone so you have more consistent devotions?

At the end of the day, the ultimate endgame is the only game in town. So, what are you doing to become more like Christ and to prepare yourself for eternity?