

# The Joy of Living the Jesus-Way

# Philippians



## PART 7: IMITATING ROLE MODELS

By Robert MacDonald

*Philippians 3:12-21*

### Part One: On the Track, Not the Podium

<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.

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

- Philippians 3:12-16

Notice the bolded words there:

1. Not that I have already obtained all this
2. Or have already arrived at my goal
3. Do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it
4. Straining toward what is ahead
5. I press on

Five different ways of saying that the journey is not yet over. Paul is emphatic that for him, and hopefully for all mature Christians, we are in a constant state of non-arrival.

We can recall Philippians 2:5-11 is sort of the heartbeat of this letter. Which starts with this phrase: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” And as we’ve talked about, “mind,” could be translated as “a pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting”.

### NOTES

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# Philippians

## NOTES

So, Paul uses all of these athletic metaphors to describe this journey of transformation – straining toward the goal, the crown, the finish line. Not yet, but ever closer.

We are on the track, not the podium. We are in the race, still running. If you're breathing, God is still building.

### **Good TV or Works of Art**

Many Christians can adopt this idea that the kind of work God wants to do in our lives is sort of like Extreme Makeover Home Edition. It makes for good TV and everything is done in a week.

But the kind of work that God is doing in our lives is less like the extreme makeover, and more like the restoration of an old building, like the Parliament buildings in Ottawa. If you've taken a tour of Parliament since 2002, some part of it has probably been under construction.

Because it's a precious building. Because it has characteristics that are unique, ornate, and matter to us. You can't just slap on some drywall and paint.

And in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes us this way: <sup>10</sup> *For we are God's **handiwork**, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* (Ephesians 2:10)

### **“Let us live up to that which we have already attained.”**

We press on, but we also live in the good patterns that God has already formed in us. We're on the track. When we hit a mile marker, that's the distance we've traveled. We can look back and be like...nice! I've moved forward. What a gift!

If you are following Jesus, God is certainly doing good work in you. Celebrate, and get excited that He wants to take you further still. As C.S. Lewis puts it in the Last Battle, “come further up, come further in.”





# Philippians

## Adjudicating Good and Bad Role Models:

## NOTES

### a) Enemies of the Cross or Citizens of Heaven

In verse 18 he talks about those who “live as enemies of the cross of Christ.” There are multiple groups that stand in opposition to the way of thinking, feeling, and acting that we find in Jesus.

For the Judaizers, the power of the cross is muted by the idea that circumcision is necessary to join the family of God. And other groups didn’t see Jesus’ self-sacrificial love as the pattern that we are called to follow, instead turning the cross into some sort of “get out of jail free” card. And throughout the Roman world, many still viewed the cross as an ultimate symbol of defeat. For most Romans, it was seen as ridiculous that any God would submit himself to be killed by humans, let alone in such a humiliating fashion.

At the beginning of verse 20, Paul contrasts these enemies with those whose “citizenship is in heaven.”

The sorts of role models that you can pattern your life after live with their heavenly citizenship as their foundational identity. And an identity that by-definition upsets and affects all other identity markers.

### b) Submission to Appetites or Submission to Jesus

Paul continues this description of poor role models, saying: “their god is their stomach.” Stomach is meant to be a catch-all term for appetites and felt needs of all kinds; it’s a poetic way of describing the person who “looks out for number one.”

But we read in verse 21 that all things are being brought into submission under Christ. Back in Philippians 2, we read about how “*God exalted him [Jesus] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,*<sup>10</sup> *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*”

- Philippians 2:9-10

# Philippians

## NOTES

If you really believe this. If you really, truly believe that Jesus, the humble servant has been given the highest place of authority in the universe, we can't live as people fully submitted to our appetites.

The kind of role models we want to follow and become are those who truly believe that one day, every knee will ultimately bend to Jesus. Their knee will already be bent to Jesus, and they will care about what He cares about.

### **c) Glorifying in Shame or Prizing Humility**

For these bad role models, Paul says "their glory is in their shame." The Greek word translated "glory" is doxa, the same word used a few verses later to describe the "glorious" body of the resurrected Jesus.

Throughout this letter, Paul constantly celebrating the person and work of Jesus, and the ways that the person and work of Jesus show up in our lives. Not circumcision, not wealth, not career or empire-building, not the self-made-man, not social or religious status. In the light of Jesus, this stuff is shameful.

Good role models don't celebrate shameful things or behaviour. They prize humility.

Recall how many times Paul emphasizes his non-arrival. And earlier in the chapter, how Paul metaphorically trashes his previous status and achievements. Paul is emulating the Jesus-shaped life that we find in chapter 2. Jesus "*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*" Philippians 2:6

For the humble, the person, power, and pattern of Jesus is focus of celebration, and heart of their value system.

## d) Set on Earth or Set on Hope

## NOTES

Paul concludes his description of these poor role models in verse 19: “Their mind is set on earthly things.”

This phrase might remind us to chapter 2, verse 5 – “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus”; where we understand the word “mind” as referring to a pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting. In contrast to chapter 2, these poor role models are thinking, feeling, and acting out of a value system that conforms to the corrupt patterns of our world.

But for Paul and the good examples he’s endorsing, their lives are defined by hope. Paul speaks of how “we eagerly await a Savior from [heaven] the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>21</sup> 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.”

The sort of people we are called to imitate are citizens of heaven who live in submission to Jesus, prize humility, and live with hope.

### **Response 1: Seek Out Somebody Worth Emulating**

First, choose some people to imitate. Not just some celebrity or historical figure who can curate their image. People you can watch and get to know. We’ve got so many people in our church family here who live in ways that are worth imitating.

And this doesn’t need to be some kind of super formal “mentorship” program or something. Look around you. Who do you see that is following the U-shaped pattern of Jesus? Pay some extra attention to how they live. Maybe ask if you can grab coffee, ask them some questions.

### **Response 2: Become a Role Model**

As we are formed, we will become people worth emulating. Paul has come to a place in his walk with Jesus where he is more than comfortable putting himself forward as a role model.

For those of us with kids, too late. Being a role model has been thrust upon us whether we like it or not, so let’s become people worth imitating.



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# Philippians

## Discussion



### Open Up

Who did you look up to as a child? Was there a person in your life, celebrity, or character that you wanted to be like?

Who are your role models now? How have your choice of role models changed over the years?

### Dig In

#### Read Philippians 3:12-21

1. What sticks out to you in this passage? What are some aspects of your life that you would want others to imitate?
2. Read Ephesians 2:8-10. How does the idea of being “God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,” affect how you view yourself?
3. Read Philippians 2:5-11. Notice Paul’s call to have the same “mind” (pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting) that we find in the life of Jesus. Is there anyone you know personally who is doing a good job of living this way? What are some patterns or behaviors that you notice? What would like to imitate?

### Prayer

Spend some time praying for each other. Pray for the strength to continue on the path of Jesus, looking ahead at the good things He has for you. Pray for the strength to “hold fast to what we have attained.” Pray for role models to enter our lives and give us tangible examples of what it looks like to follow Jesus. Pray that God would help us become people worth imitating.