



What if... We Kept Our Eye on the Prize?

Philippians 3:10-21

PPT Title

What if We Kept Our Eye on the Prize?

Main Point: We have to keep our focus on Jesus in order to move closer to Him.

Key Verse: *I move on toward the goal to win the prize. God has appointed me to win it. The heavenly prize is Christ Jesus Himself.* - Philippians 3:14

Props: A small trophy, concealed by a leader across the room; Scroll that looks like a long list of rules; Sign that says "Jesus"

INTRO/BACKGROUND

Call a volunteer up to the stage. Let's say I have a prize for you. Put a blindfold on the volunteer and ask him/her not to remove it. It's somewhere in the room. You just have to go get it and it's yours. (Child may choose to move or not. Do NOT allow the student to move quickly or get hurt.) What's the problem? For one, you don't even know what it is. And, you need to see where you're going in order to get there. Remove blindfold. Now, stay right here and look around the room. Do you see the prize? Leader should wave it so volunteer can see where they are. Now you can see the prize. What should you do next? When you see the prize, you take a step in that direction. Allow student to get the trophy and have a seat.

Now, if I know the prize is that way (point one direction) what happens if I chose to walk this way (walk in opposite direction)? Am I going to reach the prize? Nope. I'll find anything but what I was looking for. In order to reach the prize, we have to keep our eyes on it and move in that direction.

EYE ON THE PRIZE



As you might imagine, Paul had something to say about setting our sights on the prize in his letter to the Philippians.

I want to know Christ better. I want to know the power that raised Him from the dead. I want to share in His sufferings. I want to become like Him by sharing in His death. Then by God's grace I will rise from the dead.

I have not yet received all of those things. I have not yet been made perfect. But I move on to take hold of what Christ Jesus took hold of me for.

PPT Key Verse

Brothers and sisters, I don't consider that I have taken hold of it yet. But here is the one thing I do. I forget what is behind me. I push hard toward what is ahead of me. I move on toward the goal to win the prize. God has appointed me to win it. The heavenly prize is Christ Jesus Himself. - Philippians 3:10-14



Before Paul met Jesus, he was aiming for the wrong thing. He thought the prize was following all the Jewish rules. Set a scroll of rules on a stool or music stand on one side of the stage. In fact, he was so sure that following rules was the most important thing, that he worked hard to follow them better than anyone else. He was really proud of himself. He thought God loved him more because of all the rules he followed. But he didn't know that there's nothing we can do to make God love us more than

He already does (Romans 5:8). And the rules Paul followed were not from the heart of God (Matthew 15: 1-9).



After meeting Jesus, Paul understood that the prize was actually *knowing Jesus*. Prop the sign that says, “Jesus” on a music stand on the other side of the stage. Then Paul wanted to think like Jesus, and do the things that Jesus did (1 John 2:6). Knowing Jesus, which leads to being like Jesus, was the right goal (Romans 8:29)!

Start in the middle of the stage and walk to each as you talk about the path to them. On the path that led to self-righteous rules, Paul was filled with pride, anger, violence, and judgement—lots of sin. But, on the path that leads to knowing Jesus is love, kindness, goodness, forgiveness, joy, peace, and eternal life!

What's more, Paul realized he couldn't keep his focus on what he did in the past. That would be like trying to get to the prize this way. **Look behind you while you walk in the direction of “Jesus”**. What happens when your eyes are looking in the opposite direction of where you are walking? (You'll trip, you'll go off the path) Paul said that since his goal was knowing Jesus, he would forget the past and keep his focus on Jesus. Then he would be living out God's plan for his life (Acts 9:15). Paul wasn't perfect at this yet, but he took a step closer every day.

PPT Main Point
Application: Do you believe, like Paul did, that knowing Jesus is the prize? Is it your #1 goal? If so, focus on Him and do things that get you closer to achieving that goal, like praying to Him, obeying Him, reading His words. We have to keep our focus on Jesus in order to move closer to Him.

APPETITE

(Teacher Note: This section is based heavily on the sermon “A Bowl of Stew” by Andy Stanley, given at the Passion Conference, Atlanta 2011)

I have told you those things many times before. Now I say it again with tears in my eyes. Many people live like enemies of the cross of Christ. The only thing they have coming to them is death. Their stomach is their god. They brag about what they should be ashamed of. They think only about earthly things. - Philippians 3: 18-19

Paul is so sad for the people who don't know that Jesus is the prize. He said their stomach is their god! Another way to say that is: the most important thing for them is their appetite—their desire, their “want” to have something (usually what they see in front of them at the moment). This could mean food or it could be many other things like sports, computer games, popularity, etc. They trade what is important and eternal for something that is not going to last. One of the best examples of this is what happened with two brothers named Jacob and Esau.

I know you've heard of Abraham. God had an incredible plan for Abraham and his family. God made a covenant (a forever promise) to Abraham. God promised to make Abraham's family really big and God would bless them. God promised that everyone in the whole world would be blessed through Abraham's family. (**Refer to slide or write on white board.**) Looking back now, we know what those promises meant. Abraham's son would have a son. That son will have 12 sons. Several generations later, Jesus would be born into this family and, of course, Jesus came to save each of us from our sin!

Big Family! Blessed!
Abraham's son
will have a son
who will have 12 sons
Through them → Jesus

Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac and his wife had twin boys. Esau was born right before Jacob, so Esau was the oldest. Who in here is the oldest brother or sister in your family? Back in those days, being the firstborn brother was a really big deal. The oldest brother received the “birthright.” That meant that one day when the mom and dad died, and all of their money, property, and “stuff” was given to the kids, the oldest got twice as much as his brothers. Also, the oldest brother was put in charge of the family. And he was also given a special blessing from God. So who had the birthright - Jacob or Esau? Esau did. Wow. Esau kind of had it made didn't he?

Well these two brothers were very different. Esau loved being outside and hunting while Jacob was the indoorsy type. He just liked being at home, cooking and that sort of thing. Genesis 25 says:



One day when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau arrived home from the wilderness exhausted and hungry. Esau said to Jacob, "I'm starved! Give me some of that red stew!"...

"All right," Jacob replied, "but trade me your rights as the firstborn son."

"Look, I'm dying of starvation!" said Esau. [Please note! Esau was a healthy brute. The Bible says he was exhausted and hungry, but he certainly was NOT starving to death! This is something we've all said. He's exaggerating!] "What good is my birthright to me now?"

But Jacob said, "First you must swear that your birthright is mine." So Esau...

WAIT! I want to stop reading the story right here! I wish I could step back in time to tell Esau what the goal is. I want him to keep his eye on the prize—Knowing God and God's plan for him! I would like to step back in time and tell Esau: Before you take a bite, stop and think about the promise that God made to your Grandpa Abraham. (Refer to slide or write in the names on your white board.) Remember what God promised? Remember your big family and God's blessings? Abraham had a son named Isaac. Then Isaac had you, the firstborn, Esau! You are suppose to have 12 sons. And one day, Jesus will be born into YOUR family! That's the plan! It's an eternal blessing! That's the prize for you as the firstborn son!

Big Family! Blessed!
Abraham's son Isaac
will have a son Esau
who will have 12 sons
Through them → Jesus

But Jacob said, "First you must swear that your birthright is mine." So Esau swore an oath, thereby selling all his rights as the firstborn to his brother, Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. Esau ate the meal, then got up and left. He showed contempt for his rights as the firstborn. - Genesis 25:29-34

Oh no, Esau! You didn't keep your eye on the prize. You let your appetite be your god. You only thought of earthly things, not eternal things. So look what happened. (Refer to white board or scratch through Esau and write Jacob.) Jacob got the blessing that you threw away. The Savior of the world came through Jacob's blood line! And when the Bible talks about God, it says, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob..." It could have been you, Esau, but you traded it for a bowl of stew. How long did that stew last? But Jacob's blessing will last forever. (For Older Students: Many people are pretty hard on Jacob for his part in this. But the Bible does not criticize him for it. Instead, the Bible says Esau was godless. Jacob had faith in the promises of God and Esau did not. Jacob valued God's blessing and he sought after it. See Hebrews 11:21, 12:16.)

Big Family! Blessed!
Abraham's son Isaac
will have a son Esau
who will have 12 sons
Through them → Jesus



Application: When we look at it like this, we think, "Esau must have been crazy! Who would make that kind of trade?! But the truth is, most people do (Matthew 7:13-14). That's what Paul shed tears about. It makes me sad today. Most people trade the amazing plan that God has for them for the temporary stuff in front of them. (I could list tons of famous people who have done this.)

There's nothing wrong with having an appetite. God gave us our appetites! What would happen if you never wanted to eat food? You wouldn't get the nutrition your body needed and you'd get really sick. So appetites are good. In the same way, God also gives you an appetite for friendship, for love, for fun, for doing well in sports or school, etc. You'll have these appetites for your whole life. They are not bad if they are used correctly. But when we let our appetites (our "wants") rule us, we have a huge problem.

There's two things to remember about an appetite that is out of control: (1.) An out-of-control appetite tells you that the thing will be way better than it actually is. (That's

why sometimes you beg and beg and BEG to get a new toy or game, and two weeks after you get it, it's crammed up under your bed or the back of your closet.) And (2.) when an appetite is out of control, it becomes your "prize". You can hardly think about anything other than getting that thing you want.

For example, asking for a new game for Christmas is fine. If you think your life will be complete once you get it, or if you spend hours daydreaming about getting it, or you treat someone badly over it, it's a problem. Or, wanting to practice really hard at soccer so you can play well is great. But if you are willing to give up friends and schoolwork and everything else just so you can be the best, or you treat someone badly because of it, that's an appetite that's a bit out of control.

So what do we do about it? We take it to Jesus. If you find yourself way too focused on something temporary (something you can see, feel, touch, taste), and you think your life will be just PERFECT if you get that one thing, tell Jesus about it. Ask Him to help you have correct thoughts about it. Ask Him to tell you the TRUTH about that thing and about your desire for it.

Above all, ask Jesus to help you focus on the real prize—knowing Him and His plan for you. **Reference the stand with the “Jesus” sign on it.** Every day—sometimes several times a day—ask Him to show you the steps you should take to get closer and closer to the prize.