

LAUGH AGAIN: Experience Outrageous Joy

STUDY EIGHT

Happy Hopes for High Achievers

Philippians 3:1–11

While still on the outskirts of that ancient city—suddenly, a voice which must have sounded like the roar of Niagara Falls broke through: “Saul, Saul . . . why are you persecuting Me?” And the once pious Pharisee got his first glimpse of unvarnished righteousness.

—Charles R. Swindoll

In a society obsessed with high achievers, we learn early that to be recognized, praised, and rewarded, we must perform well. We cut our teeth on the hard fact that this world assigns value to us based on our outward success. Yet, God’s Word reveals a better way—the way that offers worth and value in the pursuit of Christ. We will see the eternal difference that a reliance on Christ, not on ourselves, makes as we study a passage from Philippians 3.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Do you find yourself in need of a fresh word from heaven today? Weary of the daily press to live for God but feeling frustrated by your failing self-righteousness? Don’t despair. Jesus loves turning our wasted human effort into a glorious experience of His limitless power. Bow before Him just as you are and confess your need. Ask Him to renew your mind, strengthen your hands, and encourage your heart through His Spirit (*Hebrews 12:12*). He is faithful.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

To one degree or another, we've all been raised on a philosophy that emphasizes personal achievement. But there's a pitfall when we're tempted to translate human achievement into a guarantee for eternal reward. That's what the apostle Paul warned about in Philippians 3. Take a few moments to read Philippians 3 slowly and reflectively. Make some notes about what strikes you as significant.



Observation: Testimony of a High Achiever—Philippians 3:1–6

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are compared, contrasted, emphasized, repeated, or related. We look for central ideas. Paul began this section of his Philippians letter stating his purpose in writing:

Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith. (Philippians 3:1)

Paul had a concern about a potential threat to the Philippians' faith.

A Warning to His Close Friends—Philippians 3:1–3

What did Paul feel posed a threat to the Philippians' faith? Read verses 1–3 and see if you can find clues to support your answer. Use the space below to record your observations.



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How did Paul describe the individuals harassing the Philippian Christians? What images did he invoke (Philippians 3:2–3)?

There were apparently Jews among the Philippians barking about rules and regulations while snarling about the freedom of the Spirit these Philippian believers were experiencing. For that reason, Paul warned about yielding to these junkyard dogs and urged the Philippians to give them a good kick in the teeth! Then, he offered a word of encouragement to those who would rely on Christ:

For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort. (3:3)

Notice Paul's clear description of those who live according to the Spirit and who are "truly circumcised" (3:3). These people:

- Worship by the Spirit of God
- Rely on the accomplishment of Christ
- Resist putting confidence in human effort

In your own words, how would you describe the contrast between living in the flesh—human strength—and experiencing the power of the Spirit in the Christian life?



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Interpretation: The Example of Paul's Experience—Philippians 3:4–11

By writing out that summary above, you've started down the important path toward interpreting the passage! Interpretation helps answer the question, *What does the text mean?* Using your observations, you can begin to gain insight into the author's intentions. In each section below, take a few minutes to think through the reflection questions aimed at discovering the meaning of Paul's words.

A Revealing of Paul's Proud Record—Philippians 3:4–11

At first, it's easy to dismiss Paul's words about himself as those of a proud scholar bent on bragging and seeking recognition. But there's a reason Paul listed his impressive credentials. Why do you think he went to such lengths to describe his achievements?

This would be an excellent time to find a reliable online commentary on Philippians, such as [Constable's Notes](#), and read about Paul's words regarding his achievements (Philippians 3:5–6). You may also wish to consult Chuck Swindoll's commentary on [Philippians](#). Once you've done some of that study, write down anything that stood out as particularly helpful in understanding Paul's intention for including this conversation?

According to Paul's own confession in verse 7, what changed his mind about his own human capabilities?



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Paul's dramatic experience of Christ changed him forever, resulting in a transformation of Paul's focus and passion. He went from relying fully on his own human effort to experiencing the full power of the Holy Spirit in his life and ministry.

Read his post-conversion confession reflectively:

For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right himself depends on faith. (Philippians 3:8–9)

How does this confession compare to his pre-Christ obsession with self and human effort in Philippians 3:5–7?

Paul ended this section with these bold words:

I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! (3:10–11)

Suffering no longer frightened him. Death no longer terrorized him. His own credentials no longer impressed him. The man was once for all converted! What impact do you think Paul's words had on the Philippian church?



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Correlation: A Consistent Theme—Romans 8:1–10

Correlation compares passages of Scripture to help interpret the passage in view. Paul's experience with Christ fueled his entire ministry until his death. In fact, he developed an entire theological framework for believers to experience the power of the Holy Spirit rather than trusting in human righteousness.

Many consider the New Testament epistle to the Romans to be Paul's magnum opus! Read Paul's words in Romans 8:1–10. How does his teaching on the freedom and power of the Spirit for the believer reflect his impassioned appeal in Philippians 3 to rely on the Spirit?



Application: Where Are You?

Application moves us from maintaining a mere intellectual understanding of a passage to allowing truth to penetrate our heart. And in the plainest sense of the word, according to Chuck, there are only two things you can trust in as you think about facing the living God: one is your own accomplishment, and the other is Christ's finished work on the cross. Chuck concluded his message with these final applications:

1. Trusting in your own achievements brings you glory now but leaves you bankrupt spiritually . . . forever.
2. Trusting in Christ's accomplishments and relying on the Holy Spirit for power brings Him glory now and results in your eternal righteousness . . . forever.

Do you still rely on human effort to gain favor with God, or have you converted to fully trusting in Christ as your only source and hope of true righteousness?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to take my place and suffer and die for my sin in order that I might come to know You. Deliver me, Father, by Your gracious Spirit, from any remnants of confidence in myself and my worthless attempts to stay right with You. And let me experience each day the fullness of the life-giving, limitless power of Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.



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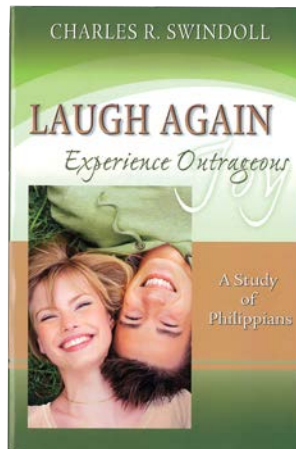
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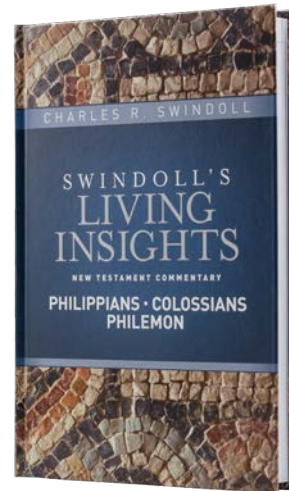
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

