

SETTING THE COMPASS
Philippians 3:1 – 4:1

I. THE LIFE OF PAUL: A SERENDIPITOUS JOURNEY.

The Christian life is more of a journey than a destination.

A) Jesus' understanding.

1) "**Follow** me..." (Mark 1:17; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21) (John 21:19).

2) "I am **the way**..." (John 14:6).

B) The Early Church's understanding.

Perhaps the earliest term for "Christianity" was simply "**The Way**" (see Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

C) Paul's understanding.

Though salvation for Paul clearly began at a precise point in time, the meaning of that event was discovered only as he continued the journey of life... but now, with a new map!

1) Paul's definition of a "son of God."

.... those who are **led by the Spirit of God** are sons of God
(Rom. 8:14).

2) Life is a race (a marathon).

- ²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in

the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize (I Cor. 9:24-27).

- *⁶ For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (II Tim. 4:6-8).*

- 3) Many (most?) studies of the life of Paul follow his **geographical** journeys. (i.e., the first missionary journey, the second missionary journey, etc.). Our study intends to focus on his **spiritual** journey.

Even as Paul moved from one place to another geographically, so he moved in his spiritual discoveries of faith. Our study aims to highlight some (not all) of those discoveries.

D) New Perspective.

One gains a new perspective on what it means to be a Christian when one's basic understanding of faith is that of a journey rather than that of a destination.

- Salvation becomes a **walk** more than a terminal point (heaven).
- Salvation becomes a **relationship** more than a thing.
- Salvation now means that **today** is more important than yesterday.

- Salvation becomes a series of important decisions rather than just one moment when we “**make a decision**” for Christ.
- Salvation becomes a series of serendipitous discoveries.

II. A SERENDIPITOUS JOURNEY.

A. Serendipity: A Beautiful Word to Describe a Biblical Reality.

1) The Origin of the Term.

The word comes from an old Persian fairy tale called *The Three Princes of Serendip* (ancient name of Sri Lanka). It seems that as these three gentlemen traveled toward their destination they kept stumbling upon wonderful discoveries that were almost equal in value to their desired destination.

2) The Derived Meaning of the Term.

A “serendipity” is a term that describes the faculty of making **fortunate** and **unexpected** discoveries by accident while looking for something else entirely.

3) A Few Illustrations of the Term.

- Astronomer William Herschel was looking for comets. He thought he had found a new one but it turned out to be a planet (Uranus).
- Roy J. Plunkett was trying to develop a new gas for refrigeration and developed Teflon instead.
- Spencer Silver and Arthur Fry were trying to develop a new and stronger adhesive for 3M but it wouldn't dry. They had invented Post-It Notes.

- Christopher Columbus was looking for a new way to India and stubbed his toe on America!
- I went to college to get an education and met my wife!

4) The Biblical basis for a serendipitous life.

³³ *But seek first **his kingdom** and **his righteousness**, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matt. 6:33).*

Jesus is promising that as we make the Kingdom of God our first priority and destination, then we discover that “all these things” are unexpectedly thrown in as well! Life directed by Christ becomes one serendipitous discovery after another. The context of Matthew 6 discloses what “all these things” includes:

- Food.
- Drink.
- Clothing.
- Etc.

E) What this means for followers of Christ today.

When life become centered and focused on one grand ultimate objective, then we begin to experience reality as:

- Profoundly **simple**.
- Simply **profound**.

The people that make a durable difference in the world are not the people who have mastered many things, but who have been mastered by one great thing. If you want your life to count, if you want the ripple effect of the pebbles you drop to become waves that reach the ends of the earth and roll on into eternity, you don't need to have a high IQ. You don't have to have good looks or riches or

come from a fine family or a fine school. Instead you have to know a few great, majestic, unchanging, obvious, simple, glorious things – or one great all-embracing thing – and be set on fire by them (John Piper. Don't Waste Your Life, Crossway Books. 2003. p.44).

B. Paul's Serendipitous Journey.

As Paul made the Kingdom of God his focus and goal, his life became profoundly simple and he began to experience one serendipitous discovery after another. The outline of our monthly meetings this year reveals some of the serendipitous discoveries that Paul made while single-mindedly pursuing his goal.

- Serendipitous Discovery #1 (October 13, 2007).
The cross is not a shameful embarrassment. No! It is our greatest glory (Galatians).
- Serendipitous Discovery #2 (November 3, 2007).
True victory (success) comes only to those who have surrendered... to Christ (II Corinthians 1-7).
- Serendipitous Discovery #3 (December 8, 2007).
It is only when I have given everything away that I find **true wealth** (II Corinthians 8-9).
- Serendipitous Discovery #4 (January 5, 2008).
It is only when I am weak that I discover **true strength** (II Corinthians 10-13).
- Serendipitous Discovery #5 (February 16, 2008).
True joy is found in suffering with and for Jesus Christ (Philippians).
- Serendipitous Discovery #6 (March 15, 2008).
I can only find **true freedom** when I become a slave of Jesus Christ (Ephesians).
- Serendipitous Discovery #7 (May 10, 2008).
It is not the past that determines who I am, but **the future** (I and II Thessalonians).

TABLE TALK

1. How do you respond when you hear salvation described as a journey? Does this reassure and comfort you? Or does it trouble you?
2. All journeys begin with the first step. Paul's first step was at his conversion on the Damascus Road. Can you describe how your spiritual journey began? When? Where?
3. Can you describe any serendipities (unexpected discoveries) you have experienced in your life?
4. As you look at the list of serendipitous discoveries Paul made in his journey toward the prize, which discoveries have you made too? Which discoveries would you like to make during this coming year?

III. PHILIPPIANS 3:1 – 4:1. The Compass Is Set.

Paul makes his theme clear only at the end of the passage.

*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! (4:1).*

This passage seems to be a sort of summary of Paul's understanding of what the Christian life is all about. Here, Paul gives his testimony and talks about when he began his journey with Christ. Here, Paul fixed his focus on the goal and set his compass accordingly.

How to Stand Firm
Philippians 3:1 – 4:1

I. Don't follow (watch out!) those going in **the wrong direction** (3:1-6).

READ 3:2-6.

Be on you guard against those who **put confidence in the flesh** (like I used to do).
They are easy to recognize, because they boast about things like:

- 1) Ancestry (birth, ethnicity) (v. 5).
- 2) Orthodoxy (Judaism, Pharisaism) (v. 5).
- 3) Zeal (v. 6).
- 4) Their own righteousness that comes from the law (vv. 6, 9).

II. Set your compass in **the right direction** (3:7-14).

READ 3:7-11.

This should be your supreme goal and objective in life: **Knowing Christ!** (v. 8, 10-11).

A. The value of knowing Christ (vv. 7-8).

Compared with knowing Christ, everything else is **rubbish/dung**.

- If I lose everything but know Christ, I am infinitely rich.
- If I possess everything but don't know Christ, I am a pauper.

B. The Basis of Knowing Christ (v. 9).

To have an intimate relationship with Christ demands that we are in good standing with God. We must be “**righteous**” (= in right standing with the Holy One). But how can this happen?

1) By firmly giving up all notions of self-righteousness.

- Based on **law**.
- Measured by **performance**.
- Earned by **merit**.

2) By firmly trusting in the righteousness announced in the Gospel.

- Based in **God**.
- Measured by **faith**.
- Given as a **free gift**.

C. What knowing Christ looks like (vv. 10-11).

- 1) Knowing the **power** of his resurrection.
- 2) Knowing the fellowship of his **sufferings**.
- 3) Becoming **like him** in death.
- 4) In order to attain the **resurrection** from the dead.

D. Knowing Christ should become your single mission in life (vv. 12-14).

READ VV. 3:12-14.

1) Forget **the past**!

Primarily those things I put my fleshly confidence in (see vv. 1-6)
They are “rubbish” (v. 8).

2) Strain **forward** for the prize... knowing Christ fully and being completely like Him in everything (3:21).

I'm not there yet... I'm not yet "**perfect**." But I keep pursuing the goal.
"This one thing I do!"

III. Imitate Only Those Who Think and Live Like This! (vv. 15-21).

READ VV. 3:15-21.

- 1) Only those of us who are "**perfect**" (same word as in v. 12) will understand these things! (v. 15). If your theology is different than mine (see vv. 1-14), well, you have bad theology. God will eventually help you to see that I'm right (v. 15).
- 2) Follow my **example**... and those who think and live like I do... because we are headed in the right direction (v. 17).
- 3) But stay away from those who have a different direction... a different theology. They are dangerous people. Don't imitate them! (vv. 18-19).
 - They are **enemies** of the cross.
 - Their destiny... destruction.
 - Their (real) god... their **belly**.
 - Their glory... is their shame.
 - Their focus... on this earth.
- 4) But our **citizenship** is in heaven! (vv. 20-21).
 - That's why we don't live for things of this world.
 - That's why we think differently.
 - That's why we have a different goal.
 - One day we will know Christ to such an extent that we will be completely like Him!

TABLE TALK

1. Philippians 3:10-11 could be called Paul's Life Mission Statement.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

2. Take a moment and write out your current Life Mission Statement. Though you may be unaware at a conscious level, such a Life Mission Statement exists... and it controls everything! To discover your current Life Mission Statement, examine your actions NOT your pious wishes. Look at your life and try to describe what has been your driving goal.. your great objective... your destination.

3. Now, write down what you **want** your Life Mission Statement to be.... Better yet, write down what you think **God** wants your Life Mission Statement to be.

4. What do you intend to do to reconcile what you wrote in answer to question #2 and question #3?
