

Read: Philippians 3:12-21

Believers Have the Goal of Heaven

Philippians 3:14

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Alyssa had run cross country for a while, but this season was different. Before this year, she usually finished somewhere in the middle of the pack. But all her hard work and practice was finally starting to pay off, and she kept moving up. 13th place, 8th place, 5th place—she was so close to a medal.

There was only one race left in the season, and it was the toughest race on the schedule. Alyssa knew that it would take more hard work to earn a medal. It would have been easy for her to just give up and quit. Instead, she spent even more time practicing and training. She dreamed of crossing the finish line first and could almost feel that medal hanging around her neck.

The apostle Paul uses the picture of a race to describe his life as a Christian. Paul had a very hard life. It would have been easy for him to just give up. He had been beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, left for dead, and spent a lot of time in prison—all because he told people about Jesus. Nobody would have blamed Paul if he had said, “I quit. Christianity is just too hard.”

But Paul refused to give up. Instead, he did the very opposite. He didn't focus on all the bad things that happened to him in the past. He kept looking ahead and dreaming of crossing the finish line. And his prize for crossing the finish line was something much better than a cross country medal that wouldn't last. His prize was being with God forever in heaven.

Paul worked hard at spreading the gospel. He traveled far and wide and shared the good news of Jesus with many people. But all of Paul's hard work didn't get him any closer to winning the prize. God called Paul to be a Christian and gave him faith in Jesus—a faith that led Paul to travel the world and be a missionary for the gospel. And when Paul's life ended, God gave him the prize of heaven that Jesus had won for him on the cross.

You might not travel the world and be a missionary like the apostle Paul, but you do have something in common with him. God has also called you to be a Christian and given you faith in Jesus. And when your life ends, God will also give you the prize of heaven that Jesus won for you. That's the best prize that you could ever receive!

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for Younger Children

- Sometimes heaven seems so far away. What can you do to keep thinking about heaven and looking forward to going there someday?
- While he was “running his race,” the apostle Paul told lots of people about Jesus. Do you know someone that needs Jesus? What’s their name?

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Why do you think the apostle Paul compared the life of a Christian to a race?
- What would you say to someone who claimed that all their hard work and good deeds should earn them a spot in heaven?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Later in this section, Paul says that we should “live up to what we have already attained” (verse 16) and that “our citizenship is in heaven” (verse 19). How do these phrases influence the way you run the race of your life?
- Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and 2 Timothy 4:7-8. What other athletic word pictures does Paul use to describe the life of a Christian? What additional advice does he give for living our lives as Christians?

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, help me to be strong in my faith while I am running the race of life. Remind me always of the prize of heaven that is waiting for me—a prize of being with you forever. Amen.

Hymn: CW 431:1,6 – I Walk in Danger All the Way

I walk in danger all the way;
The thought shall never leave me
That Satan, who has marked his prey,
Is plotting to deceive me.
This foe with hidden snares
May seize me unawares
If e'er I fail to watch and pray;
I walk in danger all the way.

My walk is heav'nward all the way;
Await, my soul, the morrow,
When you farewell can gladly say
To all your sin and sorrow.
All worldly pomp, begone!
To heav'n I now press on.
For all the world I would not stay;
My walk is heav'nward all the way.