

WALKING WITH INTEGRITY IN TIMES OF ADVERSITY  
STUDY ELEVEN

## The Integrity of Pressing On

*Philippians 1:12–14; 3:12–14*

*Believing important truths is valuable. Standing on them in tough times is invaluable. That's when mere beliefs turn into convictions.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ON Sundays at church, we declare our beliefs when we recite a creed, such as the Apostle's Creed or the Nicene Creed. We sing our beliefs in our hymns and we affirm our beliefs as we nod in agreement to the minister's sermon. But are we truly *convinced* about what we say we believe?

Often it takes a crisis to etch the beliefs we recite into the bedrock on which we build our lives. In times of adversity, we depend on our almighty Father in ways we didn't need to in times of ease, and we discover Him to be faithful and true, just as we professed Him to be. Hardships move us beyond credal faith to experiential faith, from profession into conviction.

Few believers in the history of Christianity endured more hardships than the apostle Paul. As he persevered through adversity, his beliefs grew stronger and deeper. In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll learn from his example how to *press on* when adversities *pressure* us to quit. By persevering through adversity, we do more than give assent to our beliefs. We live them.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## The Integrity of Pressing On

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### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Have you entered a season of adversity which is putting your faith to the test? If so, tell the Lord in prayer about the pressure you feel. Which of your beliefs is being tested by fire? As you open His Word, ask the Lord to firm up your faith and help you press on. Use this space to write your prayer.



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Two passages from Paul's letter to the Philippians sum up his attitude toward adversity and his determination to persevere. As you read the verses below, look for evidence of Paul's indomitable attitude.

*And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. (Philippians 1:12–14)*

*I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. (Philippians 3:12–14)*



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### Observation: Paul's Strategy for Handling Adversity

We begin by observing the text, taking note of the words and phrases and literary devices Paul used. Do you notice the *irony* in *Philippians 1:12–14*? Where was Paul when he penned these words? What did the authorities hope to do by locking Paul away? And yet, what was Paul doing all the more? Use the space below to record your observations and discoveries as you look closely at the text.

What convictions about God's power and Christ's rule do you think Paul's imprisonment solidified in him?

The next passage, *Philippians 3:12–14*, features Paul's strategy when hardship strikes. Observe the repetition, emphatic statements, contrasts, and metaphors in these verses. What do you notice about Paul's attitude? Don't overlook the tone of Paul's strong action words.



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Let's dig deeper into Paul's metaphor of running a race and winning a prize. What was Paul teaching by his example?

*Pressing on requires that we hang tough during times of suffering. Hard times are upon us now and harder times are coming. Beliefs won't get you through hard times; convictions will.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### Interpretation: What “Pressing On” Means

Biblical authors used metaphors to add insight to their points. Paul stated, “I press on to reach the end of the race” (Philippians 3:14). What kind of race? Probably not a quick sprint! Most likely, he imagined himself running a long cross-country race, perhaps similar to the ancient Greek marathon. What characteristics of a marathon runner do you see in *Philippians 3:12–14*?

Paul modeled the requirement of all who seek a high standard in any endeavor—in sports, in music, in education, or in the Christian life. We must have a *relentless pursuit of the right objectives*. What did Paul state were his objectives?



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The context helps us define the “things” Paul hoped to achieve and what Paul meant by “perfection.” Read *Philippians 3:4–10* and write down Paul’s primary life goal. For help with your interpretation of the term, *perfection*, consult the explanation of the word in 3:12 in *Constable’s Notes* at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org).

Before Paul met Christ, he was still trusting his own righteousness to merit God’s favor. But when Paul encountered the resurrected Christ, he put his confidence in Jesus as his Savior. As a result, Paul received the righteousness that only comes through faith. Paul stated, “I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I became righteous through faith in Christ” (3:9).

From this spiritual starting line, Paul set out on his pursuit of knowing Christ and following Him with the goal of becoming more and more Christlike. What does Paul’s phrase, “press on,” imply about the nature of this lifelong race?

*When we press on, we rid our lives of distractions. We spend our time and energy on essentials. We set our minds to endure any test and trial. We focus our attention on goals and priorities set forth in Scripture. And, we disciple ourselves to stay at it in order to finish well. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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### Correlation: Paul's Life of Pressing On through Suffering

We can trace Paul's pursuit of Christ back to the beginning of his spiritual journey when he was known as Saul. After Christ appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, Saul met a believer named Ananias, who told the new convert God's calling for his life. What did the Lord tell Saul through Ananias, according to [Acts 9:15–16](#)?

Immediately, Saul started proclaiming the message of Christ in Damascus ([Acts 9:19–22](#)), but then, as some Bible scholars believe, Saul retreated into the desert for three years. What did Paul say about his time in Arabia in [Galatians 1:15–17](#)?

In the vast wasteland, Saul experienced solitude with His Savior. No crowds. No acclaim. Only time alone to pray, to meditate, to retool his theology in light of Christ's death and resurrection, and to commune with God. Perhaps it was during this time that Saul had the experience he mentioned in [2 Corinthians 12:1–4](#). What was Saul's experience, and how do you think it may have contributed to Saul's lifelong passion to know Christ and press on through adversity?



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During his first missionary journey, Saul started being called by his Greek name, Paul (Acts 13:9), which means “little.” “Little” described Paul’s short stature, but it also described how Paul viewed himself in comparison to Christ. What lesson in weakness did God teach Paul through suffering that we all must learn, according to *2 Corinthians 12:5–10*?

Certainly, the power to press on in times of adversity does not come from ourselves, but from Christ in us, for when we are weak *then* we are strong.

*Paul lived in pain. But he never whined. He never complained. He pressed on! He didn't quit. He stayed at it and didn't hold back. There's integrity in living a life like that.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### Application: How to Press On through Times of Adversity

As we wrap up what it means to press on through times of adversity, we draw three conclusions based on Paul’s example. After each point, use the space provided to reflect on how you can apply this principle to your life.

First, *the plan is progress, not perfection*. Pressing on is not always easy. It can be painful and disappointing at times because we are imperfect people. However, we must remember that pressing on is about making progress, not being perfect.

Does your lack of perfection discourage you? How can focusing on progress in the Christian life help you move forward?



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Second, *the past is over, forget it!* Runners don't look back. They fix their eyes on the goal, and they push forward with each stride. If we are to press on toward the goal of knowing Christ through hardships, we can't get stuck on the past. Focus on the goal: Jesus!

Does dwelling on the past hold you back? How can looking to Christ help you press on?

Third, *the future holds hope, reach for it!* Pressing on means leaning forward even through headwinds of hardship. Don't quit your passionate pursuit of becoming like Christ.

What hope do you see in your future with Christ? How can dwelling on this vision help you endure present adversity?

Paul's extensive catalog of suffering included imprisonment, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, sleepless nights, non-stop attacks from his enemies, and more pain than we can imagine (2 Corinthians 11:23–27). Yet, he pressed on through these hardships to know Christ, and as he did, his beliefs were proven reliable. In the crucible of suffering, convictions are forged. That's true for Paul . . . and for us.





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### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for a model like Paul. He wasn't perfect, but he was determined. He pressed on, in season and out of season. Give me the tenacity to do the same—to be a person of character, integrity, and convictions. May I not simply speak my faith but live it out in my lifelong pursuit of knowing Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.*

