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## Overview

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**Biblical Passage**           Philippians 3:12-4:1

**Supporting Passages**      Philippians 3:7-11, Hebrews 6:1-12

**Memory Verse**            Philippians 3:13-14

**Biblical Truth**             Though it can be so difficult at times that others falter, we must stand firm and strive for the goal that is in Christ Jesus.

**Context**                     Paul was an extreme example of perseverance. His very life and ministry gave definition to the word. It was fitting that he call on Christians everywhere to follow his example of pushing forward toward a goal even though the road was hard and often cruel and dangerous. In this fifth lesson of the Squeeze series, we'll see that God never promised that life for the believer would be easy and that there are no assurances of safety along the way. There is, however, the assurance of the prize waiting at the end.

**Learning Goals**

- **Explore:** Students will understand what it looks like to live a life that is goal-oriented and know how to persevere through the difficulties that seek to prevent them from reaching the goal.
- **Transform:** Students will apply their understanding by determining weaknesses that keep them from maturing and reaching goals in their spiritual life.

**Prayer Suggestions**

As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for your students.

- Pray that your students will understand the importance of standing firm in the face of obstacles.
- Pray that your students will be a positive example to others when they face difficult times.
- Pray that your students will not slacken in their commitment to Christ whenever they face trying times.

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## Biblical Commentary

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### Investigation

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**Paul** wrote the letter to the church at **Philippi** while in prison in Rome. According to the book of Acts, Paul was under house arrest in Rome while awaiting a trial before Caesar. Jewish leaders in Jerusalem charged Paul with stirring up dissension among the Jewish people. He was later taken to Caesarea and held in prison there for several years while awaiting a decision on his guilt or innocence by the Roman procurator. When Paul realized that he would be sent back to Jerusalem to stand trial, he appealed to Caesar. Paul knew that he would not get a fair trial in Jerusalem. As a Roman citizen, he had the right to appeal his case to Caesar. Yet it meant that he must travel to Rome. We do not know if Paul ever had his trial.

While in Rome, Paul felt compelled to write to the church at Philippi that he had founded on his second missionary journey. According to Acts 16:12–40, Paul’s preaching in Philippi led to the conversion of Lydia, a wealthy woman from Thyatira. He also exorcised a demon from a slave girl who was being used by her owners. Paul and his missionary companion Silas were thrown into jail for this act. An earthquake shattered the jail, giving Paul the opportunity to witness to the jailer, who immediately became a Christian convert. Philippi, a Roman colony in Macedonia, was somewhat of a **Rome** in miniature because the citizens enjoyed the same privileges as Roman citizens and worshiped many gods and goddesses. Paul wrote to the church to thank its members for their financial support of his ministry, to tell them how he was faring in prison, and to warn them to stand firm against opponents who were trying to deceive people to reject the gospel and adopt a legalistic outlook and lifestyle.

### Importance

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This passage teaches the Essential Truth that **Jesus is God and Savior**. Having just expressed his tremendous desire to know Christ in a much deeper way, Paul shared his desire to set about knowing and living for Christ with his full devotion. Followers of Christ cannot relax in their commitment to Christ without experiencing negative results. If we fail to study Scripture regularly, we will be susceptible to error. If we do not pray consistently, we will not be able to discern the course that God has set us on to accomplish His will. Not only will we miss out on good things God has for us, but also others will not receive the benefit of our prayers. If we do not fellowship with other believers, then we will not experience the joy of being with other believers who can edify us and challenge us. If we fail to share Christ with others, then our Christian life becomes stale as we miss the joy that comes with helping others find a personal relationship with Christ.

Paul could have relaxed his commitment to Christ, given his situation. Instead, Paul was determined to stand firm in the faith and to encourage the Christians in Philippi to do the same even though they faced struggles of their own. Paul’s example gave confidence to the believers in Philippi. A lifetime spent following and growing in a relationship with Christ was worth forsaking all else. This was Paul’s message to believers.

## Interpretation

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**Philippians 3:12** Paul longed to grow in communion with Christ and be conformed to His image, although he wanted the Philippians to know that he had not become perfect. Obviously, Paul had reached maturity as a Christian, but he had yet to attain spiritual perfection. That he had not reached his goal did not discourage Paul or cause him to slacken in his commitment. He would press on toward it and eagerly seek to grasp it. Because Jesus laid His hand upon Paul on the road to Damascus and brought Him into the faith and transformed his life, Paul felt compelled to strive after perfection. In fact, every believer should strive to be holy and blameless. As runners in a race, we can see the finish line ahead and we keep running toward the goal with the hope that we can complete the race.

**Philippians 3:13-14** In these verses, Paul accentuated that the idea he expressed in verse 12. Perhaps Paul emphasized the message that he had yet to reach perfection in order to educate others who may have had an exalted idea of themselves and believed that they had become perfect. To the idea that he had yet to arrive at his destination, Paul added that while he ran the race for the prize, he did not look backward but forward. A runner will not do well in the race if he or she constantly looks behind while running toward the finish line. Paul did not intend for believers to forget past events that have occurred in their lives. He merely taught that we should not fix our hearts and minds on the past. One can look back on past events and be instructed by them or look at them in such a way as to impede further progress. We must not allow past events to paralyze and discourage us. Paul could have allowed his past life as a persecutor of the Christian movement to depress him and prevent him from moving forward in his relationship with the Lord. Paul would not allow that to happen. In the same way that a runner races toward the finish line in order to win a prize or a trophy, Paul ran the race of faith with his eye fixed on the prize of perfect fellowship with Christ. God has called us to go onward and upward and not be weighted down by past experiences.

**Philippians 3:15-16** Paul did not contradict what he had said in previous verses. He did not use the word *perfect* to refer to ethical perfection or mistake-free living. Instead, he described those who had reached maturity in the faith, those who are consecrated fully to the Lord. Paul urged all those who were mature to adopt the attitude that he described in verses 12-14. Paul was confident that if any in the church at Philippi did not strive to be like Christ that the Lord would reveal to them the need for an attitude adjustment. The Philippians in general had been living according to high moral standards. Paul encouraged them to continue to embrace those high standards while they made progress in their growth in Christ.

**Philippians 3:17** Paul, as elsewhere in the letter, addressed himself to the "brethren." This word demonstrates that Paul not only had an intimate relationship with the Philippians but also that he viewed them as equals. Notwithstanding, Paul asked the Philippians to imitate him as well as others who were pursuing a deeper and richer experience with Christ. Although Paul served as an example for the church, that did not mean that he tried to dominate the believers there. He led by example, not through control.

**Philippians 3:18-19** Paul's specific warning to the Philippians was against a group of people in the church that had confessed Christ but demanded that believers keep the Jewish Law as a requirement for salvation. These pseudo-followers of Christ denied the sufficiency of Jesus' death on the cross as the means of salvation. These opponents were enemies of the cross in that they were guilty of spiritual pride because they trusted in their own righteousness for salvation rather than receiving salvation by faith through the grace of God by way of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross. Bible students often refer to these legalists as "**Judaizers**." Paul described these

enemies further as those who have their minds on earthly matters, their god as their appetite, their glory in their shame, and their end as destruction. Paul emphasized the nature of Judaistic piety, which demanded the keeping of Jewish food laws as well as other “glorious” Jewish customs such as circumcision in order to be made righteous before God.

**Philippians 3:20-21** In contrast to destruction that awaits those who trust in their own righteousness for salvation, those who live by faith in Christ are citizens of Heaven. The Christian’s real home is Heaven, not this earth. That is why Christians eagerly await Christ’s second coming. When followers of Christ reach their home, their weak and corruptible bodies will be transformed into glorious, incorruptible bodies. Christians will possess bodies that are fit for the new eternal environment. The Lord is able to perform this miraculous transformation because of His great power that makes all things subordinate to Him.

**Philippians 4:1** In light of Paul’s instruction described in previous verses, he now urged the Philippians to stand firm in the faith. Paul knew that his beloved brethren in Philippi must remain steadfast in the faith because there were many enemies of the cross and because the believers in Philippi lived in anticipation of the coming of the Lord. Those who stand fast in the Lord demonstrate the authenticity of their commitment to Him.

## Implications

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We live in a throw-it-away society. We toss out everything that is used up, unnecessary, doesn’t work anymore, or we’re tired of. This sort of thinking is so pervasive in our society that it tends to be the way we look at situations too. When marriage and other significant relationships don’t work for us, we bail. When we’re not receiving what we want from our particular church, we think that it’s time to find another one that will “meet our needs.” Does perseverance exist in our way of thinking anymore? Is there any accountability to remain faithful to what we’ve committed our lives to? These are hard words, hard realities, and hard questions to ask. Yet they need to be asked in our own lives, for only when we own up to reality and begin to make changes can we influence students.

Students need to understand that a life committed to Christ means that we’re in it for the long haul. They need to understand that there will be discouragements, disappointments, and tremendous times of difficulty and uncertainty. But they also need to know that during times like these, Christ is as close as ever. Paul was determined not to give up and not let the past hold him back as shackles locked to his ankles. Christ is the reality in the lives of students. He is the only reality worth pursuing. Along the way of perseverance, students will realize their deepening love for Christ that provides them with incredible strength and stamina. They will realize His grace and love, and they will find that more and more they want to know Him and become like Him—and never turn back from Him.

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## Teaching Plan

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### Connect Activity

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#### Review Questions: Loving the Unlovable

*(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.*

*(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Download the “Review Questions” activity sheet. Print one copy for your own use.*

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide context for today’s lesson.

#### Drama: Here I Go

*(5-10 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Students will watch a drama about perseverance.*

*(5-10 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Download the drama script. Prior to the session, enlist six students to enact the drama. Give copies of the script to cast members ahead of time so that they will be ready to perform it.*

Prompt students to perform the drama. Afterward, ask: **Why do you think that Leslie was so determined? If that was the case, then why was it so hard for Elsie, Malinda, and the other teammates to be able to press on and try to win the game? Do you think that we live in a world that gives up too quickly?** Allow students to respond. Then say: **Today we’ll consider what the apostle Paul had to say about perseverance.**

#### Media Option: Perseverance

*(3-5 minutes, Reverb Media Pass required)*

*Students will watch a video about perseverance.*

*(3-5 minutes, Reverb Media Pass required)*

*If your church has purchased the Reverb Media Pass or the Reverb DVD, preview and arrange to show the “Perseverance” video. (If your church has not purchased the Reverb Media Pass, you can purchase this single video through the “Media” tab.)*

Play the video for your students. Afterward, ask students if the call to persevere is something that they are familiar with. Ask: **What does it mean to persevere? Why is perseverance so hard?** Allow

students to respond. Then explain that today they will be examining God's call to stand firm and strive for the goal that is in Christ Jesus.

## Explore Activity

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### Master Teacher Key Study: Quitting is Not an Option

*(10-15 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Students will study Philippians 3:12-4:1 to understand the goal toward which their lives should be oriented.*

*(10-15 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Download the Master Teacher Key Study. Print one copy for your own use. Also download the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Print a copy for each learner. Also provide pens.*

**Learning Goal:** Your students will understand what it looks like to live a life that is goal-oriented as well as what it looks like to persevere through the difficulties that seek to prevent them from reaching the goal.

Pass out pens and copies of the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Then use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Philippians 3:12-4:1.

## Transform Activity

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### Creative Prayer

*(10 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Students will pray for their peers to press on in their journey Heavenward.*

*(10 minutes, easy set-up)*

*Bring a photo of the youth group from a previous event—preferably a picture in which everyone is wearing the same t-shirt. Also provide dry erase board, dry erase marker, index cards, address labels, and postage stamps.*

**Learning Goal:** Your students will apply their understanding by determining weaknesses that keep them from maturing and reaching goals in their spiritual lives.

Display the group photo. Then ask learners to scan the photo and choose one person whom they will pray for as the study session ends. Instruct them to keep the name to themselves. Remind them that today's study focused on Paul's concern for his Christian friends in Philippi, which modeled for us the need to

encourage believers whom we know and care about.

Write the following prompts from Scripture on a dry erase board. Then instruct learners to scatter throughout the room and pray for their chosen person in one (or all) of the following ways.

- **Philippians 3:14:** to press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [him/her] Heavenward in Christ Jesus
- **Philippians 3:16:** to live up to what [he/she has] already attained
- **Philippians 3:17:** to stay connected with a body of believers and to mimic the lifestyles of those who follow Christ
- **Philippians 3:18:** to not live as enemies of the cross of Christ
- **Philippians 3:20:** to live as one whose citizenship is in Heaven
- **Philippians 4:1:** to stand firm in the Lord!

Close by praying over these students with the words of Philippians 4:1.

### Reverb Student Book Option: Perseverance

*(10 minutes, Reverb student book required)*

*Students will complete an activity about perseverance.*

*(10 minutes, Reverb student book required)*

*If your church has purchased the Reverb student book, preview the activity on page 305. If possible, provide a copy of the book to reference as you mention the activity to students.*

**Learning Goal:** Your students will apply their understanding by determining weaknesses that keep them from maturing and reaching goals in their spiritual lives.

As students work through pages 302-307 in the *Reverb* student book this week, challenge them to take about 10-15 minutes and read through the activity on page 305. Say: **Perseverance is a big word with an easy definition to learn—but difficult to practice.** Explain that we all need perseverance in our lives in anything that we do, but especially in living the Christian life, being obedient to God, and reaching the goal that the apostle Paul spoke of. Encourage students to take to heart all of the different references in Scripture that help them define perseverance, then encourage them to live it out.

*Squeeze 5, "Push Through It"*  
Review Questions

1. Jesus' command to "love your enemies" comes from a series of teachings known as \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. the Ten Commandments
  - b. the Law of Moses
  - c. the Sermon on the Mount
  - d. the Mountain Lectures
  
2. Jesus taught His disciples to "\_\_\_\_\_ those who curse you"
  - a. bless
  - b. condemn
  - c. eat
  - d. love
  
3. Jesus taught His disciples that when someone takes something from you, you should give that person \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. a treat
  - b. kudos
  - c. a citation
  - d. something else to go with it
  
4. Jesus told His disciples that even \_\_\_\_\_ do good to those who do good to them.
  - a. grandmothers
  - b. children
  - c. sinners
  - d. the Pharisees
  
5. Jesus taught His disciples to be \_\_\_\_\_ just as God is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. loving
  - b. merciful
  - c. gracious
  - d. patient

*Squeeze 5, "Push Through It"*  
Answers

1. Jesus' command to "love your enemies" comes from a series of teachings known as \_\_\_\_\_. (*Lesson 4*)
  - a. the Ten Commandments
  - b. the Law of Moses
  - c. the Sermon on the Mount**
  - d. the Mountain Lectures
  
2. Jesus taught His disciples to "\_\_\_\_\_ those who curse you" (*Lesson 4*)
  - a. bless**
  - b. condemn
  - c. eat
  - d. love
  
3. Jesus taught His disciples that when someone takes something from you, you should give that person \_\_\_\_\_. (*Lesson 4*)
  - a. a treat
  - b. kudos
  - c. a citation
  - d. something else to go with it**
  
4. Jesus told His disciples that even \_\_\_\_\_ do good to those who do good to them. (*Lesson 4*)
  - a. grandmothers
  - b. children
  - c. sinners**
  - d. the Pharisees
  
5. Jesus taught His disciples to be \_\_\_\_\_ just as God is \_\_\_\_\_. (*Lesson 4*)
  - a. loving
  - b. merciful**
  - c. gracious
  - d. patient

Squeeze 5, "Quitting is Not an Option"  
Drama

## Here I Go

### Characters:

LESLIE, team captain  
ELISE  
MALINDA  
3 TEAMMATES

**Props:** volleyball, trash

**Costumes:** Everyone should be dressed in volleyball uniforms.

**Creative Note:** Consider giving pieces of trash to the audience and having them serve as the opposing team's fans. You could even cue them with simple cue cards to heckle at certain moments.

*(Six volleyball players are huddled together. Trash and debris are raining down on them from offstage as well as from the audience. The crowd is jeering at them.)*

ELISE: This is bad. This is really bad.

MALINDA: Not just that. This is gross.

LESLIE: Hey. Let's focus here. I know it's been a battle so far, but we're still in this. Okay. It's Elise's serve, and they've had trouble returning it all day. So here's what I think we need to do.

ELISE: I'm not sure I really care anymore.

LESLIE: What?

ELISE: Look, Leslie, this stinks. Literally. I'm sweaty. I'm covered in trash. I've about had it.

LESLIE: Come on. We knew it was going to be like this, coming over here to play on their court. I know it's been rough, but we've just got to stick it out a little bit longer. We can win. We can. We will win.

Then we can go home, get cleaned up, and all go celebrate.

ELISE: I don't know. I say we call it quits right now.

LESLIE: You're not serious.

ELISE: I am serious.

MALINDA: I'm with her, Les. This is way more than I thought it would be. I've got better things I could be doing.

LESLIE: Better things? But this is what we've worked for. All those hours of practice. The fundraiser for new uniforms. Watching previous matches whenever we had free time. Carrying these volleyballs wherever we go.

MALINDA: Exactly. I mean, I feel like I've put enough into this already. It shouldn't be this hard. I just don't know how much more I've got to give.

LESLIE: But this is the real thing. All the rest of that was just, you know, getting ready for what we're doing right now.

ELISE: Look. All we're saying, Leslie, is that if we had known ahead of time that it would be like this, maybe we wouldn't have signed up in the first place.

LESLIE: But I told you. It's like this every time we play here.

ELISE: I know you told us. I know you did. But . . .

MALINDA: But now it's real. I guess we just didn't really believe you 'til we saw it for ourselves.

LESLIE: I can't believe you guys are doing this right now.

ELISE: I'm sorry, Leslie. I just think, for

me, this is what I have to do.

MALINDA: Me too, Les. I just can't take it.

LESLIE: What about the rest of you.

*(One by one the other three girls side with ELISE and MALINDA.)*

ELISE: So, what about you?

MALINDA: Come on. We'll go get a smoothie or something.

*(LESLIE considers her options for a moment.)*

LESLIE: No . . . No, I'm staying. You guys do what you want, but this is who I am, and this is what I'm doing.

MALINDA: But you're going to get slaughtered.

LESLIE: Maybe . . . But it doesn't matter. I'm seeing this through to the end.

ELISE: Okay. Suit yourself. *(to the others)* Come on, let's get outta here.

*(The GIRLS exit, leaving Leslie alone. She positions herself with the volleyball, ready to serve. She takes a deep breath and exhales.)*

LESLIE: Okay. Here we . . .

*(She stops and looks around.)*

LESLIE: Here I go.

*(The End)*

## Master Teacher Key Study QUITTING IS NOT AN OPTION

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

**Intro:** Have you ever started a project that you did not finish?

**Description:** People start things all the time that they don't finish, at which time they usually say something like, "It seemed like a good idea at the time, but I ran out of time (money, energy, or interest)." The apostle Paul gave us some specific ideas on how we can not only finish the race as Christians but finish strong!

**Illustration:** Helen Keller was blind. Thomas Edison's teacher called him "stupid." Abraham Lincoln was defeated in eight elections. Michael Jordan didn't make the high school varsity basketball team the first time he tried out. Walt Disney was fired from his first job at a newspaper for "lack of creativity." All of these could have quit trying to be good at their chosen fields, but they didn't despite having handicaps, despite being told they weren't good enough, or despite having failed numerous times. They had a goal, and they were determined to reach it.

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### 1. Reach out to it (Phil. 3:12–14).

**Description:** The apostle Paul admitted that he was not perfect, but he was determined to put all his efforts and energy toward reaching out to the goal of living his life for Christ.

**Illustration:** Have you ever watched the videos of runners crossing the finish line at the Olympics? The cameras always manage to catch the side angle of the runners sticking out their chests and "straining toward the goal" in an effort to win. In the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, the famous speedskater Apolo Ohno lost the gold medal but won the bronze in the 1000-meter race. He skated from last place to second place for a time and then fell back into third place because he was not able to get past the two Koreans ahead of him. Nevertheless, his striving meant that he now holds the record for the most medals ever won at the Winter Olympics.

**Application:** We need to be *that* intentional in our daily lives and choices. We're not guaranteed success 100 percent of the time, but if we're reaching out to the goal, then we have a better chance of hitting it than if we're facing the opposite direction.

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### 2. Live up to it (Phil. 3:15–16).

**Description:** According to Paul, one strategy for moving toward your spiritual goals is living up to what you have already learned or "attained."

**Illustration:** What comes to mind when you hear the word *mature*? Grandmas and grey hair? Think about a piece of fruit. When it matures, or ripens, it is ready to be eaten. One dictionary lists *mature* as moving toward or reaching full development.

**Application:** Paul's challenge is to know what you know and to live it. If we've grown up hearing lessons from the Bible, then those truths should be evident in our lives. If studying the Word is new for us, then we

shouldn't use newness as an excuse. Instead, it should spur us on to apply truth so that, like that definition, we will be moving toward or reaching full development.

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### 3. **Stand firm** in it (Phil. 3:17–21, 4:1).

**Description:** Paul offered a strategy for helping believers live up to what they already had attained. He believed that if they were surrounded by those who were maturing in their faith as well, the Philippians would be able to stand firm in the Lord.

**Illustration:** When cows graze, they stand in the field together. This isn't a protection against predators in and of itself, but that doesn't seem to matter because no wild animal will normally attack cattle when they are in a group. However, if one of the cows decided to wander away from the others and moved alone to a different part of the field, she would be easy prey for a wolf or another wild animal.

**Application:** Hopefully the consequences of trying to walk the Christian life alone wouldn't be as dire for us, but Paul is clear in saying that there are predators in our lives, those who "live as enemies of the cross of Christ"—and their mind is not on the Heavenly goal.

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**Conclusion:** Be aware of your weaknesses so that you can turn them into strengths!

**Description:** Paul made it his primary job to remind believers that the Christian life is a process. He was clear that perfection would not come on this side of Heaven (vv. 12–14). But he didn't use this as an excuse to slack off. Instead, he challenged himself and others to remember their Heavenly citizenship and live accordingly.

**Application:** If you entertain a quitter's mentality, then quitting is always an option. But if you remember that you are a citizen of Heaven with all the rights, benefits, and protection that come with that citizenship, then quitting is not an option, and you learn to push through the difficulties to "win the prize" that God has promised to all who believe!

# REVERB::SQUEEZE::lesson five

## PUSH THROUGH IT

biblical passage: Philippians 3:12–4:1

memory verse: Philippians 3:13–14

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

### QUITTING IS NOT AN OPTION

1. \_\_\_\_\_ to it (Phil. 3:12–14).
2. \_\_\_\_\_ to it (Phil. 3:15–16).
3. \_\_\_\_\_ in it (Phil. 3:17–21, 4:1).

### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What would you say is the hardest thing about being a Christian at your school?
- What is your strategy for letting others know where you stand on activities or attitudes that don't line up with your spiritual goals?
- How do you respond when other Christians turn away from the spiritual goals that you know exist in their lives?
- It's easy to be a Christian at church, but what can Christians do to encourage and help each other persevere in settings away from church?