

MADE FOR MORE, PHIL3:12-4:1

Letters from Prison #7

◆**Intro:** Suppose I were to ask you, “What has God been doing in your life lately?” Would you have an answer?... Suppose I asked, “How is the health of your soul right now?”. What might you say? ... Do you ever think about what your body will be like in 20 years? Or what you might need to do so that you like how it is in 20 years? It’s so nice when you’re 17! You have all your hair. Your skin is so smooth and pretty. Your knees are original. You remember why you walked into the room... Does the same thing happen to your soul? Is it like the body: gets larger and taller up to a point and then levels off, starts to wrinkle and grey, and finally shrink? Have you ever thought about what kind of person you will be ten years from now?

◆I think few people do. I think people see their spiritual growth as something that can wait for heaven; as if in heaven everyone suddenly shoots up or shrinks down to the perfect soul height of 6 feet. But that isn’t the way the Bible talks at all. Scripture hints that our spiritual workouts here have parallel repercussions there. Some people don’t work on their souls at all because they think we’re all like 12v batteries. Whatever your condition is when you get to the Day of Resurrection, God just drains you completely and charges you back with a full 14V. So who cares how drained the soul gets here? But, you never see that nonchalance in the writers of the Scriptures. (Maybe souls are like batteries. Batteries can lose the capacity to be charged!)

◆In Philippians Paul says things like

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◆2:12 *work out your salvation with fear and trembling*

◆3:12 *I press on to take hold*

◆3:14 *I press on toward the goal. WHY?*

◆**1. If I have faith in Jesus I will be always moving toward Jesus.** A non-growing soul is a dying soul. There is no place for neutrality in the spirit realm. Paul is reminding us by his example that conversion is a continuing, life-long process. It doesn't end because you've asked Jesus to forgive your sins. He forgives, but we still need to shed our old self. The Heidelberg Catechism asks "what is involved in genuine repentance or conversion?" and answers, "The dying away of the old self and the coming to life of the new." Bono, lead singer for U2 said virtually the same thing.

◆"Your nature is a hard thing to change; it takes time.... I have heard of people who have life-changing, miraculous turnarounds, people set free from addiction after a single prayer, relationships saved where both parties "let go, and let God." But it was not like that for me. For all that "I was lost, I am found," it is probably more accurate to say, "I was really lost. I'm a little less so at the moment." And then a little less and a little less again. That to me is the spiritual life. The slow reworking and rebooting the computer at regular intervals, reading the small print of the service manual. It has slowly rebuilt me in a better image. It has taken years, though, and it is not over yet." —Bono, lead singer of U2.

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◆ Never assume your soul has grown enough now. That is a sure way to make it die.

◆ **2. It is fitting for me to press on in my spiritual growth because God has greater designs for me.** Listen friends, God has plans, designs and aspirations for us of extraterrestrial significance. They go beyond what we experience here. It's *the prize for which God has called me heavenward*. (v14) Jesus told us to lay up our treasures in heaven (Mt6:20). Paul told Timothy to preach to the wealthy folk in his church about the same thing.

◆ *"Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."* 1 Timothy 6:18, 19, NIV.

◆ **A. God has a bright and rewarded future far beyond our imagination in store for his followers!** Gordon MacDonald writes, "When I first ran track in prep school, my coach invited me to his home for dinner one night. After the meal, he pulled out a notebook displaying my name on the front cover. He immediately turned to the back page, which bore the heading "June 1957"—three and a half years away.

◆ "Gordon," he said. "These are the races I'm going to schedule you to run almost four years from now. Here are the times you will achieve." I looked at those times. Impossible! They were light years away from where I was at that moment as a runner.

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◆ Then Coach began turning back the pages of that book, page by page, showing the 42 months he had scheduled for workouts. These were the graduated, accelerated plans for my increasing skill on the track as the months and years would go by. He had a sense of direction and development when it came to my athletic growth.

◆ Coaches and leaders of all kinds understand the absolute necessity of strategic, long-range planning. Similarly, a wise and all-knowing God has a plan for our total lives. God has far more to make out of you than you think he does.

◆ **B. When I have faith in Christ, it makes sense that I behave like Christ.** What sense would it make for Jeff Bezos' child to be living in a cardboard box (amazon?) under a bridge (Bezos founded Amazon)? Or Bill Gates' kid to do his school work on a typewriter (Microsoft)? Or Elon Musk's children to be driving a Kia Soul (Musk founded Tesla)? It just wouldn't fit, would it? Why would a child of the High King of Heaven live like hell on earth? It doesn't fit. So much is going to waste.

◆ I want us to see the fitting character of cooperating with God's design for our souls. Over and over again Paul stresses that God is our savior, he does the full work of restoring us to a right relationship with himself, as you know -by the payment of Jesus life for our sins. But you never see Paul make the assumption then that how we live here on earth doesn't really matter. For example:

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- ◆2:12 *work out your salvation...for it is God who is at work in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Or...*
- ◆3:12 *"I press on to take hold... of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."*
- ◆In 3:14 he says again that he presses on to the goal line. It's a Greek race image. At the goal line you get the prize. But he also notes that God as called him to that heavenly prize.
- ◆*"Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.""* 2 Timothy 2:19, NIV. (God's got all his people, and all his people turn away from evil.)
- ◆Maybe verse 16 summarizes it best: *let us live up to what we have already attained. Those saved by the faith in Jesus have not yet become all that we will become, or received all that we will receive!* Growth toward that only makes sense! We have a huge inheritance. Be who you are. Live up to it!
- ◆**C.** Here's why that's so powerful. Most of us live in plenty of anxiety. One famous author said we live lives of quiet desperation, and I think it's often true. But we don't have to. We have a weapon to fight that demonic lie. It is the picture of the God who comes. Simon Tugwell writes beautifully, "Another picture our Lord loves to use is that of the shepherd who goes out to look for the sheep that is lost. So long as we imagine that is is

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we who have to look for God, then we must often lose heart. But it is the other way about: he is looking for us. And so we can afford to recognize that very often we are not looking for God; far from it, we are full flight from him, in high rebellion against him. And he knows that and has taken it into account. He has followed us into our own darkness; there where we thought finally to escape him, we run straight into his arms.

◆ So we do not have to erect a false piety for ourselves, to give us hope of salvation. Our hope is in his determination to save us. And he will not give in!

◆ [Say this out loud: God is coming after me. God intends to save me. God has much more in mind for my life!]

◆ This should free us from that crippling anxiety which prevents any real growth, giving us room to do whatever we can do, to accept the small but genuine responsibilities that we do have. Our part is not to shoulder the whole burden of our salvation (be good, change the world, get things done *-mine*), the initiative and the program are not in our hands: our part is to **consent**, to learn how to love him in return whose love came to us so freely while we were quite uninterested in him.

◆ **3. Joy comes from living like who you really are.**

◆ **A.** One of the first tendencies of a fallen person like you or me is to think, "If I'm headed for heaven, then what does it matter what I do on earth?" To ask it another way, "If I'm not of this

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world, why does this one matter? Of course there are numerous answers to this.

- ◆ God received glory through our lives here.
 - ◆ Our lives affect others on the way to eternity.
 - ◆ God promises to reward obedience.
- ◆ So there are multiple reasons why what goes on here is of great validity. But to focus it down. We will find greater joy when we behave like who God made us to be. Philippi was granted Roman citizenship. The people of Philippi prided themselves on being Romans, though they were not in Roman territory. They dressed like Romans and often spoke Latin. Paul is telling the church there to dress/live/act/speak like citizens of their real homeland: heaven!

◆ *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." Philippians 3:20, 21, NIV.*

- ◆ Jesus is the real reigning emperor! All will bow to his Kingdom. Live like the kingdom you are privileged to belong to and your joy will grow. You will mature. Face it; sin, selfishness, lust, greed, hate, materialism –these things not only don't make us happy, they depress us. We feel worse for doing them. We don't skip happily after sinning. Gaining nutrients for the soul is like eating well for the body. Sure the donuts look great, but a whole box

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doesn't make you feel better. It just doesn't. Same way with the soul. Evaluate your spiritual diet.

◆**B.** The object of life is not what we think it is, which is to achieve money, power, pleasure. That's not the holy grail. The object of life is the maturing of the soul..."

◆How is the maturity of your soul coming?

◆**Conclusion:** It's has been called the greatest rescue missions of World War II. Late in that war, American bombers were sent on dangerous missions over southern Europe to cripple the Nazis' oil supplies. Many American pilots were forced to bail from their shot-up planes. The injured airmen drifted by parachute into occupied Yugoslavia, expecting to be captured or killed.

◆Instead, on the ground remarkable rescue teams were already in place. Serbian peasants tracked the path of the floating flight crews. Their sole mission was to grab the flyboys and bring them to safety—before the Nazis arrived.

◆The story of what became known as **Operation Haylard** builds toward a daring mission, a secret landing strip, and a clandestine evacuation plan. Amazingly, those Serbian peasants rescued every single American airman—over 500 in all.

◆Here's the fascinating subplot to the rescue. To travel to the evacuation site, the airmen had to spend weeks following the Serbian freedom fighters, who alone knew the path to the evacuation site. Despite the profound language

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barriers, the direction, the pace, and the destination were in the hands of their rescuers. The men had been saved from their enemy, but the journey had just begun. They still had to walk to freedom.

◆ The story of Operation Halyard sheds light on an important spiritual reality: to be rescued *from* something sets us on the path *toward* something. What are you headed toward? For the airmen it was a journey of survival. For us it's a journey of faith. The One who saved us is now calling us to walk. It's nonnegotiable. Though snatched from spiritual death, we soon discover that the Christian life isn't an arrival; it's an adventure. Christ rescues us then he points us to the path of following him.

◆ *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” Ephesians 4:1, NIV. (cf Phil3:16)*

◆ Listen, as a follower of Christ your life is not an arrival, but an adventure. There is always more of God, more of life, more of being to learn and discover. You may not see anything on the horizon, but God has all kinds of plans and good aspirations for you.

◆ If you are not a follower of Christ, but you feel moved by these truths, it is God calling you heavenward. Open the door of your heart and run out to join him! You were made for more!