

# FINISHING STRONG

## Facilitator Guide

### Before You Start This Session:

Look up Philippians 3:7-14 and print off the text in whatever translation with which your students are most familiar. Print off one copy for each student and make sure that you have markers, pens or highlighters for each student to use (anything but black). They will have the opportunity to mark up the text during your session and this will help those who don't want to write in their Bibles to participate.

### In This Session Students Will:

- Learn the importance of finishing strong on their trip.
- Study the life of Paul near the end, and see how he finished strong.
- Plan an event for after the trip, so that their finish line doesn't end on the last day of the mission site.

### Leader's Intro:

Introduce this session by saying something like:

*It's odd to focus on finishing our mission trip before we've even started. But more than anything, how we finish will determine the kind of impact we leave. There are a lot of mission teams that come to the last day and slow down for the finish line. They get careless and selfish, undoing much of the team unity that has been built up. It's all too common to have a last ditch practical joke go too far, or to leave the site in a way that leaves a bad taste in the community's mouth. How your team finishes, isn't something to just let unfold, it's something to be intentional about.*

### Finishing Strong in the Bible:

When Paul wrote Philippians, he was reaching the end. Now, he didn't know he was near the end of his life, but he sure knew he wasn't near the beginning. At this point Paul had already gone on 3 pretty lengthy mission trips. He'd already been imprisoned, stoned, bitten by a poisonous snake, and now he writes this letter to the Philippians while under house arrest in Rome.

Paul has been through the wringer, he's been pressured, persecuted, and has felt his enemies breathing down his neck. If only he would retreat! If only he would take the chance under house arrest to get some well-deserved rest and peace from those who seek to kill him! If only he would back off his mission to share Christ, and stay low. He's already done so much for the kingdom, he's already given so much more than most, doesn't he deserve a break?

Or should he finish strong?

While under close watch, limited to his house, Paul cannot live out his mission any less than when he was on the road so often with Timothy. Paul would use no excuse (no matter how good it was) to back down or lighten up. There had to be a way to let people know about the transforming love of Jesus Christ, even while stuck here. So he takes up a pen. Even when his voice can't reach beyond the walls, his words can.

### **Read *Philippians 3: 7-14* once through as a group.**

Now read it again individually and underline/highlight some of the actions that Paul is taking in his life.

Example: "I press on to take hold of that..."

What are some of Paul's actions or choices in this passage that really stick out to you? Would any of them be hard for you if you were in Paul's circumstances? Why?

Read verse 13 again. Write down some of the things we need to forget in order to give our all and finish strong on our trip? (past offenses, bad relationships, judgments?)

### **Discuss**

- What will you do to forget what's behind and go all out on your trip?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What will you do to make sure you finish strong on this trip?

### **Finishing Strong in Life:**

Francis of Assisi was born into a wealthy family around the year 1181. He grew up in Italy with all the advantages of money, yet in his early twenties he began to feel God calling him into a life of service and poverty. Against his own father's wishes, Francis gave up everything he had and began preaching the Gospel. Francis' lifestyle and words were appealing, and soon he had amassed a following. In the year 1209, he officially founded the Franciscan Order, which focused on serving those in need and preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Order's rule was simple: "To follow the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his footsteps." To this end the men who joined the Order lived simple lives and took care of the poor around them. The Franciscan Order was so influential, it also led to the founding of a similar order for women, known as the Order of the Poor Clares, named after its first member who was a friend of Francis'. Both groups served the poor tirelessly and led many to Christ.

Francis' work extended far beyond Italy however. In the year 1219, in the middle of the 5th Crusade, which was laying siege to Egypt, Francis journeyed to the city of Damietta to meet with the Sultan. Francis, in bold contrast to the Crusaders vicious attacks, shared the love of Christ with the Sultan, knowing full well it could end with his own martyrdom. Francis was not martyred, but was instead invited by the Sultan to stay for several days, even giving him permission to preach in the Holy Land, which was under Egyptian control.

Upon returning home after preaching throughout the Holy Land, Francis continued to lead the Franciscans and even set about creating the first live Nativity scene as a way of inviting people to experience the simple joy of Christ's arrival on Earth. As the end of his life drew near, several different ailments affected Francis' quality of life, yet he continued to serve the poor. It is even said that as he lay on his deathbed, he sang out loudly the words of Psalm 141.

### **Discuss:**

- What principles do you think Francis of Assisi lived his life by?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What challenges did Francis face in living his life the way he did?

- Why do you think Francis of Assisi is an example of finishing strong?
- What role does self discipline play in finishing strong?
- What impact do you think Francis' life had on his followers?

### **Activity**

One way to finish strong is to move the finish line. Runners use this theory by imagining the finish line 10 yards beyond the ribbon. It prevents their body from slowing down and getting ready to stop.

So finish strong by moving the finish line. Take the time right now to plan a team event after the trip. Mark it off on the calendar and get a commitment from everyone. Divide up the responsibilities among the team (host, food, communication, etc.). Consider using the event to write letters or send care packages back to the mission site. Have everyone bring pictures, and take the time to celebrate the wins. Use this time to also check up on everyone's growth since they've gotten back. Each person should plan on sharing (with the whole team, or in small groups) about how they've continued to live out the change and growth in their life since they've gotten back. Also, make the plan to tell the story (and evaluate) the last day. Commit to finishing strong by evaluating the "end" of your trip during this event.

There's nothing more that Satan would like to do than to undo the growth and change your team experienced. A commitment to finish strong (and a little accountability) is one of the best ways to combat that. Don't go home thinking it's over and tomorrow you get to sleep in. Go home with a plan live out the mission that God started in you on the trip.

### **Apply It:**

What is one area of your life you are facing right now, where you are struggling to finish strong? How can you set yourself up for a strong ending?