Philippians 3:12 HCSB Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus.

Note that I have already reached the goal. It would be very easy to lionize the Apostle Paul. He was an intellectual giant. He was courageous beyond all comprehension. His passion for God and his willingness to sacrifice everything else for the sake of the Master is beyond parallel. Yet, he wanted the Philippians to know that he had not yet achieved the goal that he had set for himself back in verse 10. Even this late in his life; years after his conversion and miles down the road of sanctification, he was still pressing on. He still had that sense of holy dissatisfaction with the depth of his relationship with Christ and with his own personal holiness.

Or am fully mature. How did Paul determine maturity?

a. Jesus defined maturity as producing fruit (Luke 8:14); presumably the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:9-10)

b. Maturity is the ability to speak wisely of spiritual things with spiritual elders and leaders. (1 Corinthians 2:6)

c. Maturity is to possess unity in faith, knowledge of God’s son, and measuring one’s self by Christ’s fullness. (Ephesians 4:13)

d. Maturity is to humbly recognize one’s lack of maturity and never quitting the process of maturation. (Philippians 3:12, 15)

e. Maturity is to work toward other people’s spiritual advancement – it is to reproduce Christ in others. (Colossians 1:28)

Paul adhered to the principle of intellectual and moral honesty found in…

- Romans 12:3 HCSB For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.

Paul said he was not yet “FULLY mature.” He acknowledged that he had matured over the years, but recognized the need for continued growth. We must imitate this mindset of the Apostles (2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9; Hebrews 13:7; 3 John 1:11). We must never believe that we have achieved some degree of growth, some spiritual plateau from which we may not climb any higher. Need I remind you that we are trying to conform ourselves to the Son of the Living God? (Romans 8:29)

I make every effort. The Christian life is not a casual thing. It is not a comfortable and easy stroll. It is a constant push to be a little more like God. Like an athlete that struggles, strains,
sweats, and trains, just to shave off a millisecond from his or her time, we are to be daily trying to see what parts of our yetzer hara can be chipped off and what parts of our yetzer hatov we can improve.

**To take hold of it.** The image is one of a relay racer, straining to reach out for the baton of the runner before him. The metaphor of an athlete is used quite often in the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; cf Matthew 24:13; Hebrews 12:1)

**Taken hold of by Christ Jesus.** Remember that it was Jesus who reached out and snatched Paul – literally knocking him off his high horse (Acts 9:3-6). Since then, Paul reminded others again and again that we are to be a driven, committed people. Why?

- 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 HCSB  For Christ's love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: if One died for all, then all died.  (15)  And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised.

**Philippians 3:13 HCSB**  Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead.

**I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it.** He allowed this philosophy to act as a driving force, an ultimate motivation, that helped him accept every suffering, every humiliation, starvation, imprisonment, nakedness, and near-drowning (2 Corinthians 11:23-28), as yet one more chance to become more like the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) that was his Master. He agreed with James who said,

- James 1:2-4 HCSB  Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials,  (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.  (4) But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

**One thing I do.** Paul knew how to focus his considerable intellect and prodigious energy on a single task. Far too few of us are like him in this. We are scatter-brained. We are like little children in the market place of the world, constantly enticed hither and yon by the latest shiny trinket. We begin well but we are unfortunately too prone to not ending well.

- Galatians 3:3 HCSB  Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now going to be made complete by the flesh?
- Galatians 5:7 HCSB  You were running well. Who prevented you from obeying the truth?

Jesus showed us the way. He showed us how it should be done.

- John 19:30 HCSB  When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" Then bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

And once again, Paul leads us by example. At the end of his life, facing execution, he was able to say...
• 2 Timothy 4:6-8 HCSB  For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the
time for my departure is close. (7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the
race, I have kept the faith. (8) In the future, there is reserved for me the crown of
righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not
only to me, but to all those who have loved His appearing.

This should be our goal – to die well. Too many of us want to live well, and comfortably. We
need to focus on the end. How do we want to die? Let’s let that drive us.

Forgetting what is behind. He’s not saying to not think about ANYTHING from our past.
This is, after all, the man who kept teaching us out of the Old Covenant and told us to stand
firm and hold to the traditions we were taught (2 Thessalonians 2:15). Instead, he’s saying
he’s not dwelling on what he’d done right and wrong. Those things no longer matter anyway;
not in the sense that we can really do anything about them. What matters is – WHAT WILL
WE DO FROM THIS POINT FORWARD?

As he went on to say...

Reaching forward to what is ahead. What is ahead? What have the saints always reached
forward to get?
• We reach forward to God our Rewarder (Hebrews 11:6)
• Noah reached forward for God’s deliverance. (Hebrews 11:7)
• Abraham reached forward for an inheritance in the land of promise, a city whose
architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10)
• Moses was also looking for the reward he would receive from his Maker. (Hebrews
11:26)
• Most of all, all the saints were looking forward to personal perfection. (Hebrews
11:40).

Philippians 3:14 HCSB  I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in
Christ Jesus.

I pursue. He did so vigorously and with
concentration.

The prize promised. Athletes receive
ribbons, trophies, fame, and cash. Our
reward is so much better than all these trite
and temporary gifts. It is no less that
everlasting glory.
• Romans 2:6-10 HCSB  He will repay
each one according to his works: (7)
 eternal life to those who by patiently doing
good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;
(8) but wrath and indignation to those who
are self-seeking and disobey the truth, but
are obeying unrighteousness; (9) affliction and distress for every human being who
does evil, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek; (10) but glory, honor, and peace for
everyone who does good, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek.
By God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus. We often use the terms Highlander and Lowlander to distinguish between true disciples and the careless, week devotees of Cultural Christianity. Paul's language here lends itself to that type of concept. He uses the image of someone trudging in the mud and muck of the shadow of death, suddenly hearing a heavenly trumpet’s clarion call and, looking up from the earth he sees the light of heaven shining before him. It is Christ beckoning to a new identity – a new purpose. Do you think I’m reading too much into this phrase? Then listen to Paul speaking to the Ephesians about the “before and after” process of conversion:

- Ephesians 2:1 HCSB And you were dead in your trespasses and sins
- Ephesians 2:3 HCSB We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and by nature we were children under wrath, as the others were also.
- Ephesians 2:12 HCSB At that time you were without the Messiah, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, with no hope and without God in the world.

Thank God He didn’t leave us there!

- Ephesians 2:13 HCSB But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah.
- Ephesians 2:19 HCSB So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household,

Let’s get this straight:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We were:</th>
<th>We are:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dead in our sins</td>
<td>Alive in the righteousness of Christ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carrying out our sinful desires</td>
<td>Living holy lives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children under wrath</td>
<td>Beloved children of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>Without the Messiah</td>
<td>Brothers and sisters of the Messiah</td>
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<tr>
<td>Excluded from citizenship in Israel</td>
<td>A chosen nation of royal priests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Foreigners to the covenants of promise</td>
<td>Heirs of the covenants</td>
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<td>With no hope</td>
<td>Sealed to the day of redemption</td>
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<td>Without God</td>
<td>Inseparable from God</td>
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<td>Far</td>
<td>Brought near at great cost</td>
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<td>Foreigners and strangers</td>
<td>Fellow citizens and saints, members of God’s</td>
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