

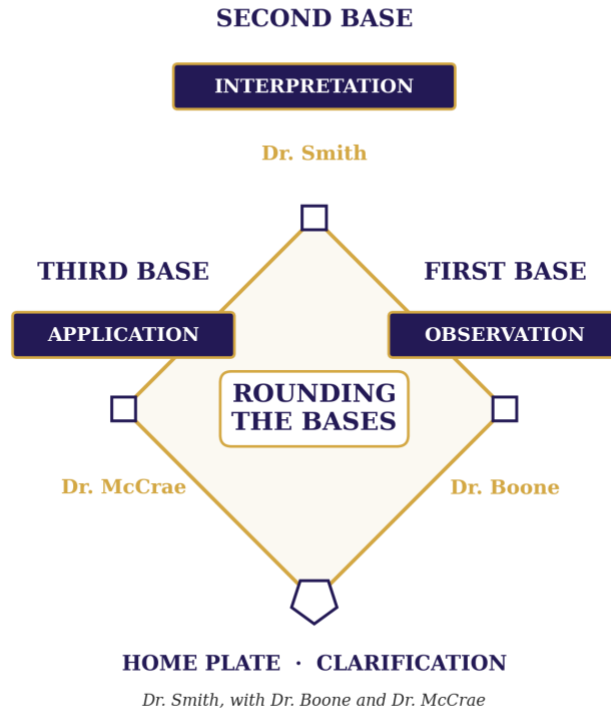


ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY · AUGUST BIBLE STUDY · WEEK 2 · AUGUST 12, 2026

UPWARD TRAJECTORY

“The Mark”: The Target of Trajectory

Not personal elevation. Spirit-led pursuit. · Not ambition. Alignment. · Not status. A summons.



THIS WEEK'S ROTATION

PRIMARY TEXT

Philippians 3:12-14 *The mark Paul is pressing toward, set by a Guide before he ever found it.*

Clause Focus: “toward the mark.”

“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

PHILIPPIANS 3:14 · ESV



THE LOGIC OF THE PASSAGE, VERSE BY VERSE

The Word Skopos

Aim, not accident, defines this word. The Greek behind “mark” is skopos, the term for a target a runner or archer fixes their eyes on, the root of our word “scope.” It is not a vague direction. It is a fixed point already located, one you refuse to look away from. You cannot hit what you have never located.

One Sentence, Not Five

Paul never stopped talking. Verses 12 through 14 are one continuous sentence in the Greek. “Toward the mark” is not a new thought. It is the object of the same press introduced in verse 12. Observation requires reading it as a single breath, not five separate soundbites. Chop up the sentence and you chop up the theology.

Habakkuk's Instruction

Visions get written, not just felt. Centuries before Paul, Habakkuk was told to write the vision and make it plain on tablets, so a runner could read it in passing (Hab 2:2-3). The mark was never meant to stay abstract. It was meant to be nameable enough to run toward. An unwritten vision is just a feeling with good intentions.

Every mark worth pressing toward was written down before it was run toward.

Scriptures: Phil 3:12-14; Habakkuk 2:2-3; Proverbs 29:18.

Now that we've seen what the text says, let's discover what it means.

A vision written down outlives the feeling that inspired it.

The Mark Is Not a Moodboard

Vision boards vanish. This mark does not. We hear “mark” and think goal-setting: five-year plans, moodboards, New Year's resolutions. Paul's mark is nothing so casual. It is fixed to Christ Himself, to the resurrection hope described just a few verses earlier (Phil 3:10-11), to becoming like Him in His death so as to know the power of His resurrection. A goal you can achieve alone was never big enough to be Paul's mark.

Guided, Not Guessed

Guidance came before the goal. Psalm 32:8 promises, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” The mark is not something Paul invented and then asked God to bless. The mark was set by a Guide before Paul ever located it. This verse returns in full at the end of the month. Remember it now.

Maturity, Not Just Motion

Movement without maturity is just noise. Paul immediately follows this thought with a call to maturity (Phil 3:15): those who are mature think this way. The mark, then, is not simply forward motion. It is the shape of a fully formed follower of Christ, someone whose whole mind has reoriented around this pursuit. You can move a lot and mature very little. The mark corrects for both.

Vision without a Guide is just a well-dressed guess.

Scriptures: Phil 3:14 (primary); Phil 3:10-11, 15; Psalm 32:8.

Now that we understand what the passage means, let's discuss what we should do because of it.

Understanding the mark means nothing if you never write it down.

THIRD BASE • APPLICATION *How do we live it?*

Dr. McCrae

Name the Mark

Vague marks produce vague obedience. Write down, in one sentence, what you believe God is forming you into this season. Not a task list. Not a title. A single sentence naming the shape of the person you are becoming. If you cannot name the mark, you are only guessing at the aim.

Check the Source

Ask who set the target before you take the shot. For each goal currently occupying your calendar, ask honestly: did God set this mark, or did I set it and ask Him to bless it afterward? Some marks need to be released, not pursued harder. Not every goal deserves your obedience. Only the ones God actually set.

Write It Where You'll See It

Habakkuk wrote it on tablets. You can write it on a mirror. Take the one sentence from the first exercise and put it somewhere you will see it daily this week: a mirror, a lock screen, a note on the dashboard. Let the mark stay in front of your eyes the way Habakkuk's runner needed his vision in front of his.

A mark you cannot see is a mark you will not reach.

Scriptures: Habakkuk 2:2-3; Psalm 32:8.

HOME PLATE • CLARIFICATION *Dr. Smith, with Dr. Boone and Dr. McCrae.* Open floor for questions on tonight's text before we close.

KEY NUGGETS

- *The mark is not merely what I want to reach. It is what God is making me into.*
- *A vision unwritten is just a feeling with good intentions.*
- *The mark was set by a Guide before you ever located it.*
- *Not every goal deserves your obedience. Only the ones God actually set.*

Somewhere between the mark and the mirror is a person who finally wrote down what God has been forming all along.

CLOSING PRAYER FOCUS

Lord, forgive us for chasing goals we set for ourselves and calling them Your will. Teach us to see the mark You have already fixed before us, clear enough to write down, plain enough to run toward. Guide us with Your eye, the way You promised, until the mark becomes as familiar as our own face in the mirror.