

Running for the Prize in 2016

Phil 3:12-16

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this one thing I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. 16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Introduction:

1. When Paul wrote these verses he was in prison and he was an old man, battered and beaten.
 - a. Imagine that scarred body, emaciated by days of fasting.
 - b. He had endured three shipwrecks
 - c. He had received a total of 195 lashes on his back, beaten almost to death
 - d. He had been stoned and left for dead
 - e. His eyesight was nearly gone
2. And yet, he said, “I am an athlete. I’m running. I’m pressing toward the finish line.”
 - a. Maybe some of his friends said, “Paul, why don’t you retire? You’ve done enough. You have written much of the NT. You need a rest.”
 - b. Paul would reply, “I’m not quitting. I’m pressing toward the finish line. I want to finish well.”
 - c. Paul did finish well.

2Ti 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

3. In our passage we see some principles that will guide us in our service for the Lord in the year 2016

I. WE NEED A PROPER DISSATISFACTION

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

A. *Our Identity or Standing Before Christ*

1. Make sure you have clearly in your mind the distinction between our standing before God and our walk with God
2. Or you could say, the difference between our identity in Christ and our behavior in the world
3. If you are in Christ then you are perfect in God's eyes
 - a) Your past, present and future sins are paid for
 - b) You have been given Christ's righteousness
 - c) When God looks down at you or me, He sees someone who is just as though he had never sinned – justified
 - d) We have a perfect standing before God
 - e) We are cleansed, blameless, forgiven completely
 - f) There is nothing we can do to make it better/ improve it

B. *Our Walk for the Lord*

1. Paul refers to our walk in vs 12, not our identity or standing
2. In this life, in our daily walk, we will never reach perfection

3. The power of sin, the power of the flesh dwells in us
4. The world, and the devil pull us down
5. It is ridiculous to believe that we can reach a state of sinless perfection in our walk before the Lord
 - a) One guy stood up in a service to give a testimony about reaching a point in his life where he no longer sinned. He was talking about all that. His wife stood up in the middle of that testimony and said, “Now, John, remember that I am here.
 - b) If someone claims to have reached sinless perfection then just ask their spouse what they think.
6. Paul admitted that he had not arrived
 - a) He had written much of the NT
 - b) He had taken the gospel to much of the known world
 - c) He started many churches
 - d) In prison for preaching the gospel
 - e) But he admitted that he hadn’t arrived
7. When it comes to our walk, if you are satisfied, God is not
 - a) We should never be satisfied with our maturity
 - b) We should never be satisfied with our knowledge
8. Some church members come to church, sit in the pew, arms folded as if to say “I am satisfied”
 - a) One child prayed, “Lord help me to be good, not too good, just good enough to not get a spanking.”
 - b) These verses should speak to the self-satisfied believer
 - c) “Press on” – was used of a sprinter – speaks of an aggressive, energetic endeavor
 - d) No one presses on if they are satisfied with their maturity
9. I want the Lord to put a divine dissatisfaction in my heart

II. WE NEED A PROPER DEVOTION – VS 13A

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do...

1. A runner running a race is focused on one thing - the finish line. Every muscle, every nerve, every sinew, every breath is brought into focus on the finish line.
 - a) *When he starts looking around and focusing on other runners then watch out*
 - b) *The runner who looks over to the stands to see his girl friend will have problems*
2. Paul obviously did more than one thing
 - a) *He made tents*
 - b) *He preached sermons and established churches*
 - c) *He healed the sick*
 - d) *He wrote books of the Bible*
3. But the top priority in his life was to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus
4. Paul was a specialist - a specialist focuses on one thing
 - a) *There are specialists in the medical field*
 - b) *There are specialists in sports*
5. He pressed on to maturity
6. See the determination in the words - “I press on” and “I press toward”
7. Mt 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.
8. Many believers are not growing in Christ because their priorities are out of order

- a) *We say, "These 20 things I dabble at"*
- b) *In our relationships, in our leisure time, in our work life, in our family, our one consuming goal ought to be to know Christ*

Proper Devotion....

III. WE NEED A PROPER DIRECTION – VS 13B

13b ...forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

A. We Need Holy Amnesia

1. To grow in Christ, to mature in Him there are some things that we need to forget
2. To stay focused on Christ – to keep pressing for the mark we need a case of holy amnesia
3. Many Christians have their headlights on their rear bumper – they are always looking back
4. Looking back is dangerous

A Sunday School class of 8 yr olds was talking about looking back.

The teacher told the kids that Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. One little girl said, "My brother and I were fighting in the back seat of our car and my mother looked back and turned into a telephone pole."

5. Forget = does not mean to fail to remember – it means to no longer be influenced by, affected by

Heb 10:17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

- a) Of course, God is omniscient, he know all, how could he forget something?
 - b) What he is saying here is that once our sins have been forgiven, God will not be influenced or affected by them anymore
6. Avoid living in the past - never rest in the present

B. Forget Past Failures

1. Forget past failures – they’ll haunt you
 - a) Paul’s past could have haunted him
 - b) Paul could have walked around all his life with a tremendous burden of guilt crippling him and he would never have become the great apostle we know and love today
2. Remember when Stephen was stoned and the men laid their coats at the feet of Saul while they did the stoning? I have always thought that Paul was some kind of bystander and they just asked him to watch their coats while they stoned Stephen. Some Bible scholars now believe that the one who watched the coats was the one who supervised the stoning. It is possible that the apostle Paul, who was then Saul, led in the stoning of Stephen.
3. **1Ti 1:15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.**
4. Paul did not allow his past to drag him down
5. When we focus on our past we are no longer looking at the goal
 - a) We are not growing or maturing
 - b) Not deepening our knowledge of Him
6. Here is what you need to do with the past failure...
 - a) Have you confessed it and turned from it?
 - b) No matter how dark and devilish
 - c) Was there a genuine sorrow in your heart that led to repentance?
 - d) One man was beating himself up over the past. His friend said, “Have you confessed it to the Lord and forsaken it?” The man said, “I have confessed it to the Lord 1000 times.” The other man said, “That is 999 times too many.”

1Jo 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us

our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

7. Is your conscious clear toward those you wronged?
 - a) Have you asked for forgiveness from those you hurt
 - b) We get things right on a vertical level and horizontally
 - c) Maybe you need to go to someone to ask for their forgiveness.
8. If you have confessed the past to the Lord and sought forgiveness, and you keep having thoughts about it, then you know that they come from the devil
9. Re 12:10 calls him the “accuser of the brethren”
10. Quit beating yourself up, you are forgiven.

C. We Also Need to Forget Past Successes

1. Focusing on past successes can derail you as quickly as focusing on past failures
2. If they were truly successes, Christ did it for you and don't focus on it

D. Forget Past Hurts

1. Paul was beaten, jailed, mocked, shipwrecked and rejected
2. Choose to forget what that person has done
3. Don't bring it up any more
4. Turn it over to God and let Him deal with it
5. When you have someone whom you have refused to forgive, it will sidetrack you into the rail yard of a wasted life
6. He was 93 yrs old when he died in October 1970. Early in his business life he experienced in economic crisis when bankers stole \$47 million over a period of several years from his businesses. In complete despair he suffered a mental and physical break down and was put into a Sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan for ten years. Several times he tried to commit suicide but was not successful. One night he wrote a suicide note to his family and then collected as many

pills as he could from other patients and then he swallowed them all, hoping to end it all.

Several hours later he woke up very groggy and walked down the main hallway of the hospital. He heard nurses making a bed and they were singing “God Will Take Care of You.” He remembered that song - his mother had taught it to him when he was young. She said, “Jimmy, when everything is going wrong and all seems hopeless, don’t ever forget that God will take care of you.”

He later said, “Then and there I was born again.”

He left the sanitarium the next day, totally delivered of his past! The doctors and nurses could not believe their eyes. He left the sanitarium with no medicine, no symptoms of his psychotic condition and went down to the bankers who stole his money and said to them, “I have no ill will towards you and I forgive you and the bitterness that almost broke me is all gone.”

J. C. Penny went on to recoup the \$47 million and became one of the most successful businessmen in history.

Proper Direction....

IV. WE NEED A PROPER DESTINATION – VS 14

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

1. The top priority in Paul’s life was to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus
2. The mark is the finish line of a race
3. Paul wanted to live in such a way that when he saw the Lord he would have the upward call of the Lord Jesus
4. Chrysostom said this upward call was from the Greek games.
 - a) *The judges and dignitaries would sit on a raised platform watching*

the games.

- b) When a runner won his race the judges would step down from the platform and give the winner his reward*
 - c) If, however, the runner had done an exceptional job, he was called up onto the platform to be rewarded.*
 - d) This is the “high calling” or upward call that Paul mentioned*
5. Paul’s goal was to know Christ and be more and more like Him so Paul would not be ashamed at His coming
 6. Paul wanted to live such a life that he would receive this upward call of Christ
 - a) This is a good motive*
 - b) This makes all the distractions seem so foolish*

Proper Destination....

v. WE NEED A PROPER DISCIPLINE – VS 15-16

15 Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. 16 Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

1. Walk in vs 16 is a little different
 - a) It means to walk in line*
 - b) It means to walk according to the rules*
2. The life God can use is a disciplined life
 - a) Just living a disciplined life does not make you spiritual*
 - b) A disciplined life does not make you more accepted by the Lord*
 - c) God can use us more and better if we have a disciplined tongue, disciplined feet, disciplined mouth, disciplined eyes, disciplined life, prayer, stewardship*
3. Don’t be sloppy in your Christian life

4. Don't be haphazard in your life
5. That Olympic athlete needed discipline
6. The professional ball player needed discipline
7. Those who are in the hall of fame needed discipline

Conclusion:

1. The end of one year and the beginning of a new year is often a time of reflection, reassessment, reevaluation as well as a time of recommitment, refocus, renewal and resolutions.
 - a. Year after year the top resolutions are the same
 - b. Get out of debt / save money, lose weight, get organized, quit a bad habit, etc
2. A preacher once attended a conference in San Diego, and he stayed in Southern California for a couple of extra days just for sight-seeing and relaxation. "I had a couple of meetings, but for the most part I was just taking a little rest and relaxation. One of the things I wanted to do was to spend a day at Knott's Berry Farm. I was there when I was a child, and I still had happy memories of it. It's the nation's oldest theme park, and it's a lot of fun for children and for grownups who occasionally want to revert back to their childhood. So I spent a day at Knott's Berry Farm. Now, they have a roller coaster there called the Xcelerator. I love roller coasters, but I like the old fashioned kind, the old wood roller coasters with the big dip. These new extreme roller coasters are pretty intimidating to me. And the Xcelerator shoots you out of the platform area at something like 82 miles an hour, and then you shoot straight up at 90-degrees, you drop over 200 feet in about a second, and then it whips you around like a flea on a rocket ship. It took me two hours to build up enough courage to ride it. But when the ride came to a stop, as I was getting off, I noticed an old fellow who

stayed in his seat. He didn't look very well, and he seemed to have some strange ticks and jerks. I thought he'd had a stroke, and I watched to see what the attendants would do, but they didn't do anything. People boarded for the next ride, and it took off again like some kind of supersonic rocket.

I rode the Xcelerator several times that day, and this man was always in one of the cars. Finally my curiosity got the best of me and I asked one of the employees. "Oh, yes," they said, "we all know him. That man has ridden the Xcelerator over 25,000 times. When he passed 20,000 times we had a little celebration for him and gave him a certificate and a season pass and a leather jacket with the Xcelerator logo on it."

Well, I didn't really want to ride the Xcelerator again, but I wanted to meet that man, and so I went around again-there weren't many people at the park that day and you could just walk onto the rides-and I sat beside him. He still had the tick and the jerk and he didn't seem to be very well; and I could certainly understand. After riding that thing just a few times, I was starting to suffer from the same symptoms. But I sat down beside him and said, "They tell me that you hold the world record for riding this roller coaster."

"Yes," he said, "I've ridden it 27,527 times. This is my 44th time today."

"Why do you do it?" I asked.

"It's my favorite ride here at the park," he said. "My goal is to ride it 30,000 times."

I would have liked to have talked to him more, but right then we were blasted off again, and by the time we rolled back to the platform I wasn't in any shape to talk to anyone. But I've thought of that old fellow many times. I actually did an internet search and he's been written up in the local papers.

His purpose and his goal in life is to ride the Xcelerator 30,000 times. That's what he lives for. Now, I don't want to be critical, but may I suggest there is something better to do with our lives. Too many of us just go around in circles. We have our ups, we have our downs, we blast off, we spin around, we accumulate records, maybe we accomplish something, but James said that anyone who knows to do good-to do God's will, to follow God's call in Christ Jesus, to accomplishing something for the Lord-and doesn't do it sins. Our slogan in life should be: The will of God: Nothing more, nothing less. Because tomorrow is a mystery, life is a mist, but God's will is a must.

3. Satisfaction is the deadly enemy of spirituality and it leads to complacency
 - a. Paul could have rested on his achievements
 - b. He wrote much of the NT - he was the apostle to the Gentiles - he had started many churches and seen many folks saved as a result of his preaching.
 - c. But Paul said that he had not arrived - he was not satisfied
4. If you are satisfied with where you are right now spiritually, then your goal is too low.
5. When you begin to feel that you have arrived, then will cease to grow as a Christian.