

The Joy of Going Forward

Philippians #6

Philippians 3:10-14

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ⁹ Let us not become weary in doing good, for we will reap a harvest at the proper time if we do not give up.

We have them on our refrigerators. We have them on our bathroom mirrors. We might even have them on our dashboards. “They” are those little quotes that someone fairly famous once said about the importance of going forward in life. We put them in those places to remind us to go forward when we (a) get stuck in the past, and/or (b) don’t feel like going forward even when we know we should be going forward. “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” (Lao Tzu). (2) “The only impossible journey is the one you never begin” (Tony Robbins). (3) “The American Express Card. Don’t leave home without it” (American Express).

The reason we have those quotes on our refrigerators, bathroom mirrors, and dashboards has everything to do with the fact that life occurs between the goals, hopes, and desires that we have for our lives and the water in the face reality that our lives don’t often go as planned. When life doesn’t go as planned, we have a decision to make. Will we press on and go forward? Or will we press stop and sing the chorus of “Remember When” for the rest of our days?

Last week, we learned two important lessons from Philippians 3:1-8. (1) We have too many blessings to count. For God’s blessings in our lives are infinite and beyond measure. (2) Chief among those many blessings are (a) our salvation and (b) the joy that comes from it. Today, we learn what the joy of our salvation looks like in action. It is going forward and pressing on. We are saved by the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, we go forward in the power of the Holy Spirit because of the Gospel.

Friend, there is great joy in going forward. But you cannot go forward when you focus on what’s behind you. You can only go forward by leaving the past where it needs to be and setting your sights on what is ahead. You cannot go forward when you think you’ve already arrived. You can only go forward when you recognize that you have come so far but have yet to arrive at your destination. If anyone knew that it was the Apostle Paul. He was chained to a stone wall in a Roman prison and yet his message in Philippians 3:10-14 is simple: Go forward! Press on! To do that, Paul had to make (1) a decision about his purpose (I want to know Christ); (2) a decision about his present (I press on/straining toward what is ahead); (3) A decision about his past (forgetting what is behind) and a (4) decision about his future (I press on toward the goal to win the prize). So do we if we want to go forward. Turn with me to Philippians 3:10-14.

¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

1. A Decision about Your Purpose (10-11)

- **University Christian Church:** (1) There was once a church in NY called University Christian Church. (2) At her height, she ministered to the community and the local university. (3) But along the way something changed: University Christian Church forgot her purpose. (4) After the last service in 1963, the pastor hung a sign on the door that said: “Gone out of business. Didn’t know what our business was.”
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Going forward becomes a joyful experience when Paul’s mission statement becomes ours: “I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining the resurrection from the dead.” That’s a statement that will prevent you from ever going out of business for Jesus.
- **Four Priorities in Paul’s Purpose:** (1) Priority 1: “I want to know Christ.” The word “Christ” is a purposeful choice here. It means the “anointed One.” Then he follows it with “know.” Knowledge here is not an intellectual familiarization with facts. It’s taking the facts from the head and making them the experience of heart, hands, and feet. (2) Priority 2: “And the power of His resurrection.” The word for power in the language of the New Testament is *dunamos*. It’s where we get word “dynamite.” And he links it to “resurrection;” or to bring back to life from the dead. (3) Priority 3: “And participate in His sufferings.” Everyone suffers; Only the ones who know the Lord Jesus see a purpose in it and a chance to feel the way Jesus felt. For those who follow Christ, no amount or degree of suffering is in vain. It always serves as purpose. (4) Priority 4: “And attain the resurrection of the dead.” There is a resurrection of the dead in Christ coming in the future when the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more. Paul didn’t know when that day would come. But he was certain of its arrival.”
- **App:** A Christian without purpose is like a ship without a rudder. We know our purpose: to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. And teaching them to observe what Jesus commanded. Going forward in that will help us never to run out of business.

2. A Decision about your Present (12)

- **CS Lewis:** “You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are right now to change the ending.”
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Going forward becomes a joyful experience when you press on where you are right now to take hold of what Christ has for you.
- **Requires Pressing On in the Present:** (1) An Important Term for the Philippians: It means to persevere, to endure, to finish; to go on when you don’t feel like you can go on. (2) A Familiar Term for the Philippians: It was a military term used by Paul to paint the picture of troops hiking forward in the snow that the church in Philippi, which was a military colony of Rome, would have been familiar with.
- **Requires Moving Towards Taking Hold in the Present:** (1) Philippi was also a sports town; now he uses a sporting metaphor to denote what we should strive for: “taking hold.” (2) Runners ran in Philippi to “take hold” of the prize. Boxers boxed to “take hold” of the prize. (3) Together both “pressing on” and “taking hold” denote moving towards something in the present.
- **App:** “Forget the former things; do not dwell in the past,” says the Lord. “See, I am doing a new thing in the present. Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland” (Is 43:18-19). We might not be able to go back and change the beginning. But we can start right now to impact the ending.

3. A Decision about Your Past (13)

- **Summer Olympics in Paris:** (1) Next summer, the Olympics will be in Paris, France. (2) We’ll have an opportunity to see the 100-, 200-, and 400-meter sprints. (3) We’ll also see the 4x100 and 4x400 meter relay. (4) In all those races, there is one thing we will not see. It is this: looking back. For the finish line isn’t behind you. It’s in front of you.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Going forward becomes a joyful experience when you forget what is behind and strain towards what is ahead.
- **Requires Forgetting What Is Behind:** (1) If anyone could rest on past laurels, Paul could. (2) At this point in the Apostle Paul’s life, he had written 75% of the New Testament; (3) Crossed the Mediterranean on three separate occasions to preach the Gospel; (4) Laid the theological foundation from which we get our understanding of the significance of Jesus Christ in our lives; (5) Yet Paul says: “that’s in the past. I’m looking at what lies ahead.”
- **Requires Straining Towards What’s Ahead:** (1) I love the image of “straining towards what’s ahead.” (2) It’s the image of a runner nearing the finish line sticking his neck and chest out in order to cross the finish line. (3) That’s not something you can do looking backwards, only forwards.
- **App:** Life is divided into three parts: that which was, which is, and which will be. Let us learn from that which was in view of that which will be right here and now in that which is.

4. A Decision about Your Future (14)

- **Cab Driver Receives a Better Crown:** (1) After a preacher died and went to heaven, he noticed that a NY cabdriver had been given a better crown than he had. “I don’t understand,” the preacher said to St. Peter. “I devoted my entire life to my congregation.” To which, St. Peter respond: “Our policy is to reward results.” “Now what happened when you gave a sermon?” Peter said to him. “Some people fell asleep.” “Exactly,” said St. Peter. “And when people rode in this man’s taxi, they not only stayed awake, they prayed like they have never prayed before.”
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Going forward becomes a joyful experience when you live in view of the prize and the crown that awaits when you finish your race.
- **The Decision to Live in View of the Prize:** (1) After races in Philippi, a most anticipated event occurred. (2) Every runner was brought to a wooden platform with a throne-like seat. (3) There, the presiding judge would either (a) crown; (b) pass over; or (c) disqualify each runner. (4) For those receiving the crown, the presiding judge would say “well done, good and faithful runner.” (5) Paul anticipates not a passing over or a disqualification, but a prize and a pronouncement: “Well done. Good and faithful servant.”
- **Implication:** (1) Though we are saved by grace and heaven is the reward for those who know Christ, there is a time coming when we will be measured for how we’ve run that race. (2) That’s what a crown of righteousness is all about; (3) It will either be bestowed or withheld.
- **App:** I’m pressing on the upward way, new heights I’m gaining everyday. . . Lord, lift me up, and let me stand. By faith on Canaan’s tableland; a higher plane than I have found. Lord, plant my feet on higher ground. There is joy in pressing on and moving forward. Amen.