

Progress Is Not Always Easy!

Philippians 3:10-14

In Philippians 3 Paul writes about succeeding in life. There is a market glut today of books on success. Everyone thinks the latest book will be the one to make their life fulfilling and solve all my problems. The ironic thing to me that many books on success are written by people who have no track record. They have no real experience in the world. They just wrote a book!

When I want to learn about success, I want somebody who's done it. I want to look at somebody who has accomplished what I want to accomplish. We learn much more about success -- life --from models than we do from manuals.

So who is our model? The Lord Jesus Christ is, of course. But next to Him, The most successful Christian who ever lived would have to be Paul. He was an incredible man. He lived life to the fullest. He made his life count.

When you read the letters of the Apostle Paul it becomes very apparent to us that Paul was familiar with athletic activities. He has all kinds of athletic terminology in his letters. It causes us to think that probably, as Paul was touring on his preaching ministry, sharing the Gospel of Jesus to the various major cities of the ancient world, that along the way he would go by the stadiums and he would attend the games. Paul evidently was a sports fan.

While watching those games he would draw many analogies and many lessons about life. He came to see that the Christian life is very much like a race. In those days they had the Olympic Games and there were a lot of track and field events in those days. One of the main ones was running. Evidently, Paul uses figures of speech about running to describe what the Christian life is all about.

What he is doing in these verses is basically giving us the picture that the Christian life is like a race, that we are in a race, and that we are racing to be what God wants us to be, growing into that kind of person God would have us to be.

In Philippians 3 we have Paul's autobiography. In the first eleven verses he deals with his past. In the next seven verses he deals with his present and his future. From it we can see the model for successful living. Paul even encourages us to follow his example. "Join with others in following my example, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you." Philippians 3:17

Paul ask us to examine ourselves.

Are you where you want to be?

Are you up and down...

...in your walk with God?

...in your career?

...in your character?

...in your relationships?

...in your finances?

...in your attitude?

...in your knowledge of God's Word?

Knowing you're not where you want to be is the beginning of a breakthrough.

Paul has a picture of what Christ wants for him and from him.

Do you have a picture of what Christ wants for you and from you?

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.” Philippians 3:12

Paul is admitting that he has not arrived and that he doesn't have it all together. Maybe you don't have it all together. If you don't, you've come on a good week! Paul didn't have it all together either, but he wanted to get it all together, and you can too!

Paul's Three Conclusions:

1. Always More

Admit you don't have it all together, that you still have a long way to grow. That you haven't arrived, that you're not perfect. You do an inventory of your life. You've got to know where you are before you know where you want to go. You start by looking at where are the areas that need improvement.

“I want to know Christ.” Philippians 3:10

He already knows Jesus. Paul is an old man now. If anybody had the right to claim he had arrived it would be Paul. He wrote most of the New Testament. He single handedly spread Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. He made an incredible impact on the world. Yet Paul, at the end of his life, says "I don't have it all together. I haven't arrived. I'm not perfect. I'm still growing." The point is, successful people never stop growing. They are always developing, growing, expanding, learning. Even when he gets to be an old man, in prison, he says, "I haven't arrived."

Paul said, *“I want to know more because there's always more to know.”*

He wrote this several years after his Damascus Road conversion. Paul's life was marked by an unquenchable desire to know Christ. *“Know”* means *“to know in a personal, intimate way.”* It implies the result of serious study. *“To know firsthand, not simply in a casual, passing way.”* Some translate it, *“I long to know Christ.”* We commonly say, *“There's no more, there's no next, and the result is that there's no breakthrough. There's only breakdown.”*

- There Is More Of God.

You will never know all of God. You'll never know all of Him. He's more majestic, more holy, more powerful, and more loving than you can ever imagine. He is an ocean, and some of us have just snorkeled the surface of the depths of His love. The more you know Christ, the more you want to know Him. Paul had met Jesus, but now he wants to know Him more and grow in Him.

“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 to the resurrection from the dead.”
Philippians 3:10-11

Paul integrates the eternal and the earthly. Too many times we separate the spiritual from the physical. He wants all that Jesus has for him.

- There's More In You.

God has put more in you than you've ever developed. More talent. More toughness. More power of God through the Holy Spirit. When you quit, it's a choice, because there's always more you haven't tapped into.

- God Has More For You.

We all pray for a better life, but God doesn't just give it to us, we have to grow it. Like a garden, I have to grow. There are steps to growing a garden and there are steps to growing our heart. Plow. Plant. Cultivate. Water. Feed. Grow. Harvest.

Growth is not automatic. I'm not all I should be, and I'm not all I will be, but I will not give up until I'm all I can be.

I have to grow to reach God's purpose. Philippians 3:12

"You have to do your own growing, no matter how tall your grandfather is."
—Irish Proverb

There is room for growth. Philippians 3:13

It takes a lot of effort to grow. Philippians 3:12

We lose hope because we conclude that "God doesn't have any more for me," so we lose hope in marriage, in business, in growing, in serving, and in life! We have these dead end attitudes that hold us back. We think we are in a dead end job, a dead end marriage, or a dead end life, but God has more for us. When you don't believe there is more, you won't go after it, even though it's been there the whole time.

"It's what you know after you learn it all that really matters." John Wooden

- "*Know the power of your resurrection.*" Philippians 3:10

Know the power of a new life.

The resurrection is the power to turn failure into victory and despair into hope.

- "*Know the fellowship of His sufferings.*" Philippians 3:10

Obedience makes me like Him.

- "*Attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*" Philippians 3:11

The word means "to stand up and stand out."

The Question, "Where do I need to grow?"

2. Always Forward

"*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.*" Philippians 3:12

You can't run looking backward, you have to always look forward. Runners have to forget. They have to keep pressing on. The road in front of you is all that matters. The ground you have covered is no longer important. Forget the ground behind you. Reach forward. Whether it's success or failure, you have to put it behind you. Many people have sat down and lost the future because of the past.

On the road to Damascus, God put His hand on me, and I want to find out all that God has for me.

He says in verse 12 that I haven't attained. I'm not perfect. I'm not there yet, "But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." He's talking here about the starting of the race. You will notice first of all that he says, "I have been apprehended." The word "apprehended" means to lay hold of. I have been laid hold of. He's talking about his experience of salvation. He is talking about when the race began in his life.

This may sound trite but it's absolutely essential. You cannot run the race until you start the race. There has to be that starting line. There has to be that time when you get down on the starting mark and you get ready and the gun fires and you start the race. There was a day when the race started in Paul's life. Paul was on the Damascus Road and the Lord Jesus Christ apprehended him. Jesus Christ laid hold of him. The same thing is true for every believer in this building. If you have truly been saved and you know Christ as your Savior, there was a time in your life when Jesus laid hold of your life.

The question: "Where do I need to change?" Take a personal inventory. We're good at inventorying other people and see where they need to change.

3. Always Forget.

Stop being manipulated by your memories. We say, "I can't forget!" Learn to leave the past behind!

"This one thing I do Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead." Philippians 3:12

Paul says if he is going to be all God wants him to be he's not going to waste any more time on yesterday. It's gone. It's past. My past is past. I let go of my guilt, grief, grudges. I let go of the past so I can get on with the present. Success involves learning to forget.

Don't carry unforgiven sin into a brand new year. Don't carry old problems into a brand new year. Don't carry old grudges into a brand new year. Don't carry yesterday's victories into a brand new year. I keep moving on into God's future for me. Forgetting those things which are behind. Most people are more preoccupied with the past than they are focused on the future. Paul had to deal with his past. Paul said, "I am focused on the finish line that lies ahead of me." Some are in bondage to their past. You need to be set free from your past.

To forget means: don't let the past affect you anymore. Don't let it control you or have power over you or manipulate you. Successful people learn from the past without dwelling on the past. There's a big difference. Successful people learn from the past and once they learn, they let it go and move on. They don't keep hounding themselves about the past.

Do not allow the past to influence you or to affect you. In other words, don't let the past keep you from winning the race. He's saying to not run looking over your shoulder. It's human nature we tend to remember things we should forget and we tend to forget things we should remember. We hold on to the cruddy, garbage memories we should let go of and we tend to forget the things we should remember, the lessons we learned through it all.

He's not saying that you don't have any memory of the past. They tell me you never ever really forget anything. Some people don't have a hard time forgetting. The older you get the more you tend to forget.

- Put your past sins behind you.

Past sins and failures can be a ball and chain to the present and the future. The devil loves to throw our past in our face and use it to depress, discourage, and defeat us. You can't focus on where you are going until you forget where you've been. "Forget" doesn't mean "to fail to remember." "Forget" means "to not be influenced or

affected by.”

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Hebrews 12:1

Past Sins that Haunt Us

The devil is a master of throwing the past in our face. So many Christians are continuing to rehearse things in their heart that God has long since forgiven and forgotten. They won't forgive themselves. They're holding on to the past. Satan's favorite desire is to paralyze us with the past, to manipulate us with the memories.

Paul says "I learn to forget the past." He doesn't set around beating himself, filling himself with self-condemnation for mistakes. Everybody here has blown it. We have things in our past that we regret. Paul, of all people, probably had many regrets that could have haunted him. The Bible says in his B.C. days he was a persecutor of the church. He hounded people who were believers. He held the coats of the men who stoned Steven, the first martyr and probably enjoyed it. Paul faced his faults and forgot the former so he could get on with life. Nothing you ever do will change your past. No tears, regrets, self-pity. The past is past, over, dead. You can't do anything about it. Let it go. Learn from it and let it go.

Past Sins that Hinder Us

David said, *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”* Psalm 103:12

- Put your past sorrows behind you.

It may be that someone has been deeply hurt in the past. If there is any bitterness or hard feelings in your heart, get them out.

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” Isaiah 43:18-19

- Put your past successes behind you.

“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 2:14

The word for “goal” is “skopos” which means “to look at.” We get our word “telescope” from that word.

Paul said the key to living a productive life is to focus.

Celebrate What Has Been Done.

Give God praise for every victory and blessing in your life!

Anticipate What Can Be Done.

Great athletes know how to get in a zone. They become so focused and so intent on what they are doing that they lose track of everything else. They become unaware of the crowd. Sometimes they can even have broken bones and they are not even aware of pain from the break because they are totally focused. They are totally concentrated.

Paul is saying that we need to concentrate our total attention on the assignment of running the race for the Lord Jesus Christ. There are too many Christians who instead of saying, "This one thing I do," they would say, "These 40 things I dabble in."

"A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." James 1:8

"Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth; unite my heart to fear thy name." Psalm 86:11

Paul says, find out what counts. He's talking about the power of concentration. If a river spills over its banks you have a marsh, a swamp. But if that river is confined between certain banks, dam it up, channel it and it is a tremendous source of power. Light diffused is powerless, weak. If you take power and light and concentrate it you have a laser. It is powerful. That is the power of concentration. Life focusing on one thing.

If you want to be a professional, there is a secret -- concentration. Professional athletes concentrate on one thing. They specialize. You can't know everything, be everything, do everything. Paul says "I face my faults, forget the former and focus on the future and that is the one thing I do. I have my goal clearly in mind."

Less than 5% of Americans ever write down a life goal. It is not by accident that the 5% that do are the top leaders in their field. Write it down and focus on specific goals.

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

When the runner turns that corner and heads into that final stretch and when he hits that tape, it is time for the reward. He had hit the tape and there would be the thunderous applause of the people in the stands. Then an official would come to him and say, "You've been called up." The successful, victorious athlete would go up to the Emperor's box. He would step into that box and the Emperor would congratulate the successful runner. He would award him the prize. He would award him the emblems of his victory. They would get 500 drachma. They would be awarded free front row seats at all of the special events. His family was relieved of their income taxes. Everything imaginable was awarded because he had successfully run the race.

"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 win the prize." 1 Corinthians 9:24

There is a certain way of running, the way professionals run.

What was Paul's goal? *"So we make our goal to please Him."* 2 Cor. 5:9 There is no more rewarding goal in life than to please God. Paul wanted to be able to stand at the end of his life and hear Jesus say, "Well done thou good and faithful servant. You were faithful in a few things. Come into my joy."

The Question: What memory do I need to let go of?