

Lesson 16

Conquering by Continuing

Philippians 3:12-14

I'm sure you've had people ask you to share your favorite Bible verse with them. People frequently ask me to do that, and it's always hard to respond. I guess I have to say that I have multiple favorite verses. But there's no doubt that one of those favorites is 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." It's just so comforting to know that in salvation our past sins and failures have been wiped away by the grace of God!

How thrilling it is to know that, according to the Bible, as Christians we are new creatures or creations in Christ! And while that was certainly true of the apostle Paul, he did not want to give the impression that he had arrived at spiritual perfection. So, as we step into today's passage of Scripture, we read that Paul (just like you and I) is still very much involved in the race of life. Read as he explains:

Philippians 3:12-14

- ¹² Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.
- ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,
- ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Out of God's Word...

1. What one accomplishment was Paul intent upon (verse 12)?

And what action was he taking to attain it (verse 12)?

2. Jesus Christ laid hold of, or grasped, Paul when he was on his way to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-19). After that encounter, Paul was possessed completely by Christ and desired only to lay hold of, or to grasp, the purpose for which he was grasped by Jesus. And so Paul is now pressing on in hot pursuit of the call Jesus made on his life. Paul likens his hot pursuit to a race in which he is a runner.

A runner has an aim. What words in verse 13 indicate Paul's focus?

3. But a runner also needs concentration. Note these stages of Paul's concentration:

Verse 13—Regarding the past,
Paul _____

Verse 13—Regarding progression,
Paul _____

Verse 14—Regarding the goal,
Paul _____

...and into your heart

- According to Paul's example, we should always concentrate our energies on moving forward now and continuing to move forward in the future. Where are you putting your focus?
- Are there "things" that hinder your forward focus? Can you name them and then determine how to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and...run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1)?
- What can you do today to
 - Forget those things that are behind?
 - Reach forward?
 - Press toward the goal?

Heart Response

"But one thing I do...." How would you finish this statement, dear friend? The famous preacher D. L. Moody wrote these words from a scholar named Gannett in the margin of his Bible beside Philippians 3:13: "Men may be divided into two classes—those who have a 'one thing' and those who have no 'one thing' to do; those with aim, and those without aim in their lives.... The aim in life is what the backbone is to the body: Without it we are invertebrate."

How frightening it would be to be "invertebrate"—to be spineless, weak, and weak willed—especially in the Christian life! But thanks be to God for these cherished-yet-instructive verses about the process whereby you and I may know and accomplish our "one thing"—attaining the great prize of the Christian race. What are the steps that make up the process?

- ☞ Mental obliteration. A runner never looks back, but mentally obliterates the part of the course which he has already covered.
- ☞ Unwavering progression. A runner strains every nerve and muscle as he keeps on running with all his might toward the goal. Indeed, his hand is stretched out as if to grasp it. He is thinking all along the way, "I want this win!"
- ☞ A goal in view. A runner's eyes are always fixed on the goal. And that goal is at the end of the race, not some other place through the course. Whether that goal was a pillar or a person, the sight of it and the contemplation of reward compelled the runner ever goal-ward.

Oh, beloved pursuer of God's prize, are you refusing to look back? Are you pressing and straining forward with unwavering progression? And are you ever looking to the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus? In the words of the blind Scottish minister, George Matheson, "We conquer—not in any brilliant fashion—we conquer by continuing." May you and I conquer by continuing! Press on, dear one!