**Press On Toward the Goal**

Any worthwhile accomplishment requires commitment and hard work. For centuries athletes have invested countless hours increasing their strength and honing their skills in their chosen events. The apostle Paul referred to the runners of his day who exercised great self-discipline in everything necessary to win a race (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). His point? If an athlete is willing to make any sacrifice to win a perishable crown, what should be the attitude of a Christian who hopes to wear an imperishable one?

In Philippians 3:13-14, Paul offered what could be considered a mission statement for his life. If you lay aside some parenthetical phrases, he said, “One thing I do…I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” The additional phrases are important to understand the nature of his efforts, but Paul’s single-minded devotion to pushing toward his goal is striking.

**Not there yet.** In verse 13, Paul makes it clear that he hasn’t accomplished everything that needs to be done; there is always room for improvement. That is a sign of humility coming from a man of Paul’s character. None will earn their way into heaven, but God certainly expects constant growth in faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (2 Peter 1:5-7).

**Forget about it.** Paul wasn’t preoccupied with the past; not what he gave up, not his accomplishments. He was ever sensitive to his past persecution of Christians, but he didn’t allow it to discourage him from driving forward. We too should make the past right with God, then focus on what lies ahead.

**Reach for the future.** None of us know what it holds for us. We can be assured that there will be some good times and there will be times that are heartbreaking. With confidence that God loves His children and wants what is best for them, we should embrace the future, watching for the opportunities to help others, be a light shining in the darkness and to lead others to Christ.

**The upward call of God.** God has called us through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). He has called us out of darkness into His marvelous Light (1 Peter 2:9). We have been called upon to take upon us the divine nature and to escape the corruption of the world (2 Peter 1:4). But the ultimate prize is the resurrection of eternal life that awaits those who remain faithful. That is why single-minded focus on the goal is critical.

**Life is hard.** Those who ignore Christ’s teachings often make it harder than it needs to be. But there is a cost of discipleship and Christians know it and own it. Nothing puts hard times in perspective like keeping your eye on the Prize. Paul put it this way: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18). Amen to that.

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