



Press on towards the goal to win the prize...

Philippians 3:14

This morning I would like to begin by asking 3 questions:

1. what is your goal in life?
2. are you on the right path to achieving it?
3. is there anything distracting you from reaching your goal?

When I was young, I didn't have a goal in life and I seemed destined to work on a farm; I wasn't very academic at school and was easily distracted in class, but worse, if I couldn't do something or was unable to understand it, I would just give up!

The highlight of my week was Saturday morning and playing golf with my Dad, but he was so difficult to beat. The harder I tried to hit the ball past him, the more it went out of control, and so did I. One time after missing a tee shot, I threw my club in a rage and the club went twice as far as the ball did! My Dad gave me such a telling off, I never did it again!

At that point I wanted to give up playing golf, but my Dad wouldn't let me. I'm so glad he encouraged me keep playing, as it led to a career in golf, not playing the game but building and maintaining courses for others to enjoy, "a good walk spoiled" as someone once said!

That career eventually led us and our two children to Portugal over 30 years ago, where we came to faith in the Lord Jesus in this very room and 4 years ago into full time ministry here at All Nations.

However, the pinnacle of my sporting youth was not playing golf but being able to complete a 50 mile walk for charity. It took a lot of training, hard work and preparation to finish.

If your goal in life is to be successful in sport, in business or even in a relationship, then hard work and great determination will be required whichever you choose!

But what does the word of God say about our spiritual goal in life, and does it require the same effort and determination?

First, we must know what our spiritual goal is.

The Apostle Paul declared what his spiritual goal was in **Philippians 3:8**

... the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, ...that I may gain Christ.

He confessed everything else was worth-less, actually he used much stronger language than that!

His goal was not just to know about Jesus, but to know Him personally, to serve Him, to suffer with Him and one day be like Him.

Is that your spiritual goal in life?

He admitted he had a way to go in **vs. 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.*

Notice Paul's honesty in that he recognises his need to press on, to keep going, to move forward and not give up.

In writing to the first church in Europe, established at Philippi in Greece, Paul encouraged believers to remain steadfast. He used terminology taken from the Olympics:

vs. 14 *I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.*

He used similar language writing to the Corinthian church:

1 Corinthians 9:25 *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever.*

It may seem like Paul is contradicting himself by saying we must try harder, but chapter 3 began with a strong warning against putting confidence in the flesh.

vs. 3 *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.*

He expresses d sadness at living to gratify the carnal nature:

vs. 18 *For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.*

He goes on to say their end, if not their whole journey, will not go well, as they live for earthly pleasures, rather than for the glory of knowing and gaining Christ.

vs 19 *Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.*

Paul's counsel was not to get caught up in the works of the flesh but to press on to take hold for that which Christ Jesus took hold them.

He also counselled them not look back in **vs. 13** ... *But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind...*

The Lord Jesus gave similar counsel to His disciples in **Luke 9:62**... *'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'*

Do you believe the word of God is encouraging you to press on toward *your* spiritual goal today?

You may not yet have received the Lord Jesus into your heart, and if that is you, I encourage you to consider God's gift of eternal life through faith in His Son.

To those who already know Him, to those who have received Him, the word of God encourages believers to remain focussed on Jesus and live up to what has already been gained, that is the unmerited favour of God.

We have been encouraged throughout Paul's letter to the Philippian church, to follow Christ's example and here again the Apostle reveals that our Christian witness is an example to others – be it a good one or a bad one!

We read in verse 15-17 that...

vs. 15 *All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently that too God will make clear to you.*

vs. 16 *Only let us live up to what we have already attained.*

vs. 17 *Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.*

Everything we do, everything we say, either reflects or deflects the glory of God!

Paul and his young team were modelling Christ's example of suffering and serving. However, they did nothing in their own strength but overcame

immense obstacles, supernaturally through the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 3 concludes with a reward for winning the prize:

vs. 20 *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

vs. 21 *who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

Though we desire to reflect Jesus in this life, we will all experience the battle between the flesh and the spirit, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world and the word of God in Romans declares that we are more than conquerors in Christ.

The goal and the prize for staying the course and keeping the faith, is eternal life through faith by knowing Jesus.

John 17:3 *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Our challenge this week is to believe that God's spiritual goal for our life is to know His Son Jesus, to walk in step with the Holy Spirit and to believe that He gives strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

Let me finish with a scripture to hide in your heart this week.

Galatians 5:16 *So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

We don't need to struggle on, but rather press on to know there is love, joy, and peace in a relationship with Jesus this morning – we can experience His presence, purpose, and power right now to receive the prize to which we were called heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Amen