

**UNBROKEN JOY
A PRESSING AMBITION
Philippians 3:1-16**

We are in Philippians, Chapter 3. We are going to continue our study through the book of Philippians. It's a privilege just to be able to be together this morning. I'm grateful for your participation in our singing time today and it's great to be in the house of God together, excited for what God is doing. Hopefully you are stirred in faith for things that might seem difficult or impossible in your own lives. That's what God's word does to us, and what being together does, and what singing together does. Hopefully, you are experiencing that.

We are going to be in Philippians, Chapter 3, verses 12-16. We are going to focus primarily on verses 12 through 14. Let's look at God's word. Verse 12:

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. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

Let's pray. God, we come again in prayer because we just can't pray enough. We need to, because everything around us will tempt us to believe in the exact opposite of what we are reading about today. Left to ourselves, we drift. Left to ourselves, we wander. Left to ourselves, we are deceived. So God, I pray that correct thinking would flood us, that you would infuse us this morning with a greater sense of your greatness, of your power. I pray that we would see true purpose in our lives from your word, the power of your Spirit, and that we would see you as surpassing worth. Help us, God. Help me. Help my friends in here this morning. Help us all to be changed and moved by your words, God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

I am always looking for interesting articles to read myself, and then if they ever become relevant, to pass on in certain settings of teaching. I actually came across this article a couple of weeks ago and I shared it with our young adults group, AXIS, last month. FYI - the AXIS young adults meeting

is happening next Friday night. Just a little plug. Be there. It's going to be awesome. We are studying the attributes of God and I just know it's going to be a great year for us.

So, I came across this article and it just was so funny to me in so many ways that I actually wrote a blog post about it on our blog. Another FYI - we have a blog on our website. You can always go and look at those. We are trying to produce more content these days, and trying to make you aware when that content is produced, so go check those out as well. You can subscribe to it or just go and read them at your leisure.

But I came across this article in the New York Post and it had the title, "South Florida is the organized fraud capital of America." I thought it was funny that New York was talking about us being involved in organized crime. But, the organized fraud capital of America -- look at some of the things that were written in this article.

First it says, "Over the past decade or so, the three most populous South Florida counties -- Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach (all of them right here) -- have become less renowned for the old-school "Miami Vice"-style drug shootouts than for scammers stealing hundreds of millions from government, banks and individuals by using laptops, stolen identities, and fake medical procedures." This is pretty humorous. It goes on to say, "The endlessly creative crooks come up with fake Jamaican lotteries, false marriages for immigration purposes, mediocre seafood marketed as better seafood, insurance rip-offs from fake accidents and fires -- even foreign substandard cheese passed off as domestic top shelf. But the big money is in a trio of major fraud trends: Medicare, mortgage and identity-theft tax refunds."

Here we are: South Florida, organized fraud capital of America. It's just incredible! It's an amazing world that we live in, and it forces a response in us, even reading that. I know that we understand this, living in South Florida. It's all about the hustle, all about getting where you are going and whether that's driving a car, or just vocationally, or whatever it is. We have ambition. We have drive. We want to get where we are going and sometimes it's not always with the best motives or methods. It forces us to ask the question, "Well, how does that make you feel? How do you respond when you don't know what's real or what's fake?" It's understandable why so many people are cynical or untrusting (and I'm sure we can all agree) -- even rude down here. If you feel like you are always being hustled, what do you do?

Most of us, I would say (maybe that's a generous statement) - most of us have pursuits, things that we work hard to go after. We would maybe call it ambition. Sometimes that ambition leads us to good places and sometimes it leads us to not so good places. We are living in the organized fraud capital, crime place, in all of America. But we are not the only ones who have problems, right?

Recently we just read about Volkswagen. Sorry, Brian. You don't have a diesel, so I guess you are okay. Did you hear what happened? They installed a device on their diesel cars that when they did their emissions testing to see what kind of pollutants came out of the car, this device was installed on millions and millions of cars to make it seem like they are super, super efficient, no pollutants. And just for the test. But then as soon as they got on the road, they said that 10-40 times more pollutants came out once they got on the roads than when they were being tested. So now the CEO has resigned and he has apologized. They are going to face all kinds of fines. It's incredible. I'm listening to people on the radio and they are just so outraged. I don't care that much, but people feel like they have been betrayed by a loved one. So deceitful. It's one thing to have little mishaps here and there or just accidental issues, but when it comes across as, "We have been purposefully lied to and deceived," it is frustrating.

It really just begs the question: What drives you? What pursuits are you chasing after? What is your main pursuit? What is your main ambition? This passage I just love. I love it. It's one of my absolute favorites in the entire bible. Everything surrounding this passage is just absolutely incredible. Last week, Brian did a great job of teaching us from the previous section on knowing Christ. Really, that passage is integral in understanding what we are looking at today. It absolutely will serve us if we can quickly read through again verses 2-11, because it leads up to this great passage that we are in this morning. In verse 2, look at what he writes. The Apostle Paul says:

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the (real) circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth

of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

And then he starts off: “Not that I have already obtained...” It’s helpful for us to look over some of those points from that previous passage where Paul is telling us that we can’t trust in outward things, things that might make you seem holy, righteous. He is using the example of circumcision, but it expands to so much more in our accomplishments, in our possessions. Those things are not what we are to grab hold of. That’s not how we relate to God and that’s not how God relates to us. So Paul rehearses his resume, right? Do you remember that from last week? He tells us that if anyone has reason to trust in outward things, he did. Then he goes on to tell you who he was and what he accomplished, that all things he considered gain, all the things that he thought were making him right with God were actually keeping him from God. So this great reversal takes place in Paul’s thinking. All that was gain he now considered loss. They don’t matter. Only Christ matters. Just to know Christ, is what he says, being found in him, sharing in his sufferings. All of that is surpassing worth. Wow.

There is a video floating around that has become very popular on the Internet. It was started by a social media/news site on the Internet called Buzz Feed. I hope this doesn’t offend you. If you have liked this video, I am sorry, but I am not going to speak highly of it. It’s called, “I’m Christian, but I’m not...” It says, “I’m Christian, but this is what I am not.” It kind of goes through this progression. It’s well done. It’s got production value and different people represented, diverse in every way. It starts of going through this progression: This is what I am not, this is what I am, and what do you want people to know about Christianity? So, it says, “I’m Christian, but I’m not,” and then you have people saying different things. “I’m not homophobic.” “I’m not perfect.” “I’m not close-minded.” “I’m not unaccepting.” “I’m not uneducated.” “I’m not judgmental.” “I don’t place myself on a pedestal,” and a few other things similar to that.

So then it asks the question, “What are you?” It says, “I am accepting.” One person says, “I’m gay.” One person says, “I’m feminist.” One person says, “I believe in science.” “I love Beyoncé.” “I love

wine.” “I go to church on Sundays.” “I have friends from different religions and I love them all.” And then, “What do you want people to know about Christianity?” We are all kind of not crazy. We shouldn’t be judged by the people you see in the media. People are ruining Christianity. It’s about love. Being a good neighbor. So on and so forth.

In two minutes, this video attempts to encapsulate what a Christian isn’t, what it is, and what it wants the world to know about Christianity. Through the entire thing there is not a single mention of Jesus. And I know the pull for us to look at those things and say, “Yes, I don’t want to be judgmental, I don’t want to be intolerant, I don’t want to be this. I want to seem educated and I want to be X, Y, Z.” But there is nothing of Christ. Nothing! How is it possible?! What do you want people to know about Christianity?

We read Paul, and everywhere else in the scriptures, but let’s just stay with our writer right now. He is saturated in Christ. His life is loss. Christ is gain. It’s that simple. Of course, we want to live out the other principles of not judging, being a good neighbor, and loving. Yes! But those attributes only come from a deep and profound knowing of God, and when we see these things that are Christ-less it’s troubling. It’s bad.

Here’s the deal. Here’s how it relates to our passage. Look, if that’s our message, okay, if that video encapsulates who we are -- Riverside Church, if we want that to be our stamp - you want to know who we are? Just watch this two-minute video. If that’s the message we preach - a thin, shallow, moralistic and yet Christ-less gospel, then we are in trouble and everybody who hears it is in trouble.

I’m going to tell you why. Two reasons: One is because you cannot be saved from that message. There is no gospel, no real gospel in that message. There is no salvation in that, no forgiveness of sin. The only sin that’s talked about really, is underneath -- and you kind of have to read between the lines -- is the sin of being intolerant. Other than that, there is nothing in that to save us from God’s judgment of sinful man against a perfect and holy God. We could call this a cosmic problem. That type of message does not solve the cosmic problem of our separation from God.

The second thing is maybe a little bit more practical and hits us in our day-to-day life. It’s just that that message has no teeth. It doesn’t supply what we need on a day-to-day basis in the fight of life. I don’t have to tell you that life is hard. Life is hard locally, globally. Paul likens life; he compares it to a race. If anybody has ever done any running or athletic stuff or any racing, you understand that

racing is hard. In a race or any athletic event, it is a fight to finish. It's a fight! There are forces we fight from within us. It could be fear, fatigue, laziness.

And there are forces that we fight from without, from outside of us, right? Other runners - they are a pain. Nature. Bumps in the road. The elements. The bottom line is that it is a fight to finish the race and we don't like that. We think that as we get further along, closer to the finish line, that things should get easier and easier. We want that. We want the race to become simpler as we get closer to the end. We crave comfort and ease, and when things go bad, we can look to God and we start rehearsing our resume. We start to say, "Well, God, look what I've done for you! Do you see all the sacrifices I've made? All the things that I have put up with and the things that I've said no to? And this is how you repay me?"

Paul had ambition. It was targeted in the right direction. We see examples all around us of poor ambition, ambition with bad intentions, bad consequences. Our ambition needs to be set, our purpose needs to be set in one direction. As we do that, we engage in a fight to keep that purpose, that ambition, the priority. Because there are a million things tugging at us to say, "No, no, I'm most important. I'm most important. I am what you need to keep your eyes fixed on." And we have to fight. It is a fight. It's a race. And in the race, it is a fight to finish the race. Christ has to be the center.

What I want to pull from our text are three things that I think we get here -- that in the fight, Christ provides three things. He provides purpose in the fight. He provides power for the fight. And he provides or is the prize, the end of the fight.

So let's dig in here. The purpose in the fight. Christ provides purpose in the fight. Look, anything that we put our hands to, we always want to know that there is purpose in what we are doing, right? We want there to be meaning. We want to know that we are making a difference, that there is some sort of good that's coming from what I am putting myself through. It made me think of "The Karate Kid," the original, of course. The remake was good too, but the original - Mr. Miyagi, Daniel LaRusso. I mean, two great characters from the '80's. In case you haven't seen the movie, I will tell you some things, okay? You have these two main characters: Mr. Miyagi, he was the sensei. He was training Daniel. Daniel was getting beat up at school and all these other kinds of places. He needs to stand up for himself, so he needs to learn karate. I am sure participation in dojos across the country went up after that movie came out. But he didn't have him learn all kinds of cool kicks

and punches, which is what we wanted to see. He had him wax his car. He had him paint his fence, and he had Daniel paint his house. He's doing these menial tasks and Daniel doesn't understand why he's doing this stuff. He's like, "I'm supposed to be learning karate. I'm supposed to be learning how to fight, how to defend myself. I have this tournament coming up I have to fight, and you are having me do all your chores around the house." He didn't see purpose. He thought he was wasting his time. But then, right when he was about to quit -- one of the great scenes in movie history. They are standing toe to toe and Mr. Miyagi tells him, "Alright, show me 'wax the car.'" And you know, he starts kicking and punching. He is able to block everything, miraculously! And all of us kids started waxing on and waxing off, and doing all that kind of crazy stuff, and hurting each other because we didn't know what we were doing.

He finally saw the purpose in what he was doing and it changed everything for him. His purpose was marked. It was clear, and he wasn't wasting his time. We don't want to be wasting our time in life. Paul understood his purpose. He understood his ambition: It's Christ -- to know him and to make him known. And not only that, but to continue to move forward in his faith. That's really what's happening in this passage. He is talking about progress. He is talking about moving ahead in his faith, to keep progressing. You see it over and over again in this tiny little passage, an amazing repetition of words, right? We see this phrase, "I press on." It's repeated twice. What it means is to move rapidly and decisively toward an objective. We see it ahead and we press on and it doesn't matter what's happening in our way. I see the target and I go for it decisively, rapidly.

Secondly, you see this phrase. It's a little harder to see in the English, but it's repeated four times here. It's the same root word, and it's that phrase, "make it my own," and actually also the word "attained." You see it right in the beginning in verse 12. He says, "Not that I have already obtained this..." Then he talks about, "making it my own," "making it my own," "making it my own." That's the same root word. It all comes from the word meaning, "to lay hold of," "to grasp," "to pursue." He uses this image of running a race, running hard, running fast, with a purpose, with the purpose of laying hold of Christ, grasping, seizing Christ, making it his own.

He makes this interesting clarification right away. I read the previous passage about Paul. He is going through all these things. "Everything I gained I counted loss. I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, obtaining the resurrection from the dead..." And in verse 12 he says, "Not that I have already attained this." Well, he is making a little

clarification, in case anyone misunderstands that he hasn't reached this perfect state yet. He hasn't reached perfection yet. He hasn't finished the race. He hasn't crossed the finish line, but his purpose is focused. It's as if it has been done already. And in one sense, it has been done because Christ has already done it in his life.

In one of my favorite lines in all the bible, Paul says, "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on..." Man, we need that. We all need purpose to keep us going, but not just any purpose -- the right purpose, a holy purpose, godly purpose. We need that to keep going forward. Life is more than the pursuit of the American dream. It's more than the pursuit of accumulating wealth and possessions, the endless search for approval, significance, qualification. Christ has done all of those things. We find our purpose in the pursuit of Christ — his righteousness, to share in his life and, as Paul said earlier, in his suffering.

Listen, if we are not intentional in keeping this as our main purpose, we will drift. We will drift, and we will latch onto anything that looks secure. There are so many things out there that look secure, so many handholds that look like they are firm and steady, but when we put all our weight on it, it slips. It falls, and we come crashing down.

Life is hard. It is full of confusion. It is full of trouble. But, when our purpose is fixed on Christ, there is promise of joy and strength in the midst of confusion because he gives us power. He gives us power to fight, power for the fight. He gives us purpose in the fight and he gives us power for the fight. Look at the language used: pressing on, laying hold of, forgetting what's behind, straining for what lies ahead. These are images of work. These are images of hard things.

In order to press on, in order to grasp, you need power. You need an energy source. The danger is that we want to find energy sources in the wrong things, like I was just talking about. Or we want to muster up the energy in the wrong places or within us. We think, "Okay, if I just get out there and do it, it's going to happen." And if we're not careful, we will do that. If I can talk to just the men in the room for a second...we like to fix things. We want to find solutions. We are not great at listening. We just want to get the problem out of the way. Sometimes we have this demeanor about us - all of us -- we say, "Okay, I got this. All I need to do to make things right is.... I just need to.....make one more sale. I just need to get my life in order. I just need to stop overeating. I just need to get that promotion. I just need to get my kids out of the house."

Look, the “just need to’s” of our life can get overwhelming. And the reality is that they don’t work. Not really; not for what we need. The “just need to’s” cloud our vision. They distract us. They are usually substitutes for God. Christ is the power. For Paul, all of his grasping and pressing and straining—it might seem like he is just, “Okay, I’ve got to get out there. I’ve got to strain forward. I have to do these things in order to make it to the finish line.” Like he’s just rolling up his sleeves and getting it done, but it’s not like that. Look again at verse 12. This is so amazing. He says, “I press on to make it my own, because...” What? “...Christ Jesus has made me his own.” I press on to make it my own. I press on to seize Christ, because Christ has seized me. He radically pursues Christ because Christ radically pursued him.

Do you remember how Paul was changed in that moment in Acts 9? He is walking down the street, going to the next city where he can go kill Christians, drag them out of their house, arrest them, whatever. He is walking, and what happens? Christ in a vision meets him, knocks him on his behind, blinds his eyes, and talks to him about what’s going to happen in his life and how he needs to knock it off. This is all very casual language I am using. Jesus asked him, “Why are you persecuting me?” He says, “Who is this?” He says, “I am Jesus!” And I’m going to tell you what’s going to happen, and he is changed from that moment on - a radical encounter where he now goes from terrorist to this apostle, proclaiming the good news of Christ in all the areas that he was out to destroy. It’s amazing!

And Paul is constantly, what we in scripture I think, living with this tension between God’s ultimate rule and reign over his life and the reality of day to day living. Honestly, we all have to deal with this every single day. God is the absolute power source of life, yet God calls us to live and to make decisions every single day. He is our power, yet we strain and forge ahead. We have to understand that Paul is clear when he teaches that. He makes more of God and about God’s role in our pressing on than about our strength in and of ourselves to do it.

I just want to give you a few “greatest hits,” if you would, of some of Paul’s statements talking about this. We can look at other writers too, even Jesus himself. But just to keep with Paul’s perspective, look at earlier in Philippians 2. This is one of the great passages: “...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Look, there is life every day that’s going to come at you, but it is God who is going to sustain you every step of the way, and he

is going to work in you. Ephesians 3:20, one of my absolute favorite passages: “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us...” He is talking about power. Romans 1:16: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” 1 Corinthians 1:18: “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Finally, Colossians 1:20: “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”

Do you see God at work in us? Christ did not just come to hang out for a little while, do the cross, leave, and now God rules from afar. Christ came to live and dwell, not just on Earth, but in us. That power is real, and that’s why Jesus told us that he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. We live with this power source inside, not in the way that we like to think, “Okay, I just need to find it and stir it up.” No, it is active and alive inside of us.

Look, I am sure that we all could use more power throughout our days. Some of you need more power right now. You’re falling asleep. I see it. We need power in our life, and five hour energy drinks just won’t cut it. They are good for a few hours, and then they’re gone. Coffee, exercise - these are fine things, but they are not enough. What is occupying the place of power in your life? What are you trusting in for strength? What are you relying on? Guys, it’s a long, long race, and we tend to trust in the wrong things to sustain us through the race.

So one question that I was thinking about as I was preparing was, “How do you know?” How do you know if you are trusting in the wrong things? I would say that I think it usually comes from when Paul says, “forgetting what lies behind, straining forward...” I think we sometimes dwell on what’s behind, and it prevents us from straining forward to what lies ahead. We focus on what has passed. We focus on the things behind us. The bible tells us that when we do those things, that when we trust in the wrong things for strength, that those are idols. And idols never give us what they promise. They promise us great things. They promise us everything that our sinful soul wants, and we constantly put them up as power alternatives to God.

It’s interesting - in Psalm 115, the psalmist tells us that when we create idols that really are just powerless, well we become like them. He says when we make idols, we become like them. So if you are trusting in the wrong things for power, you will know. Just like in a race. If you are running a long race, there is a point when energy is leaving you.

I have done a few long races, off school course type races. It's inevitable. The first time I did it, I didn't know better. I was going. I was running. Then about an hour in, or an hour and 15 minutes in, something hit me like a ton of bricks, and I hit the wall. Not the wall I was trying to climb, but the proverbial wall of fatigue, and I could not shake it. My energy was gone. It was depleted. It was sucked out of me, because I didn't prepare. I didn't prepare the right way. I didn't have nutrients with me to take. This happens. Of course, the race is figurative. As we are going through life, if we do not take the proper precautions, if we do not do the proper things, then we will see spiritual fatigue.

There are some symptoms of that. These are maybe some things to help you know if you are trusting in the wrong power source.

- Patterns of discouragement, you are just always discouraged.
- Discontentment. Always discontented. Nothing seems to be right. Nothing seems to be ever going your way. It's hard to see the good in your life.
- Maybe a temptation to quickly give up on things, or not follow through. We have the desire to do it, and maybe even say yes, but you just can't follow through. You are lacking faithfulness in certain areas.
- Joylessness. You're just miserable.
- Laziness.

I'm not saying all of these are just signs of trusting in the wrong power, but they very well could be. So, what are remedies for these things? What should we be doing first? Before we go to the doctor, before we try to figure out what's happening biologically or physiologically, we can start and say, "Okay, how is my relationship with Christ? How is my relationship with my Creator?" He is the one who made me, breathed life into me. I am lifeless, so maybe I need to go back and say, "Something might be wrong in this relationship, so God, breathe new life into me." And we do that by prayer. We do that by worship. We do that by meditating on God's word, being with God's people, serving, getting out of our bubble of self-focus and moving out on other things. It helps. It can help. It's not the only thing.

You might be getting confused and just saying, “Well, Adam, I thought it’s not about us getting out there and doing it.” Well, it’s not, but we can’t just sit in our beds waiting and saying, “God, if you want me to get up today, then get me up.” He might! And it most likely will be unpleasant. No, he calls us to live and act every single day with the power that he provides. We can go to him and we can wake up in the morning and say, “God, there is the temptation in me right now to be joyless, faithless, hopeless, powerless. I need you.” And that’s when God wants to move so powerfully in us, when we can admit that we are weak. Because when we are weak, he is strong. Paul did it. He went to God. He has this – we don’t know what it was – some kind of ailment. He called it a thorn in the flesh. He said, “God, would you take this away?” He said he prayed it over and over again and God said, “I am not going to, because I am stronger when you are weak. My grace is sufficient for you.”

Man, we need to speak that over our lives and see it and embrace it. I know we don’t like being weak, but we are not fooling anybody. We are all just weak in various levels. We need Christ and we need to run to Christ and say, “God, would you help? I need your power to make it through.”

The power for the fight. Purpose in the fight. Power for the fight and the prize at the end of the fight. It’s funny, because I hesitate to even say, “at the end of the fight,” because I think that’s what Paul is primarily referring to here – the finish line, the goal. But we have the prize. There is a greater prize, a more fulfilling prize at the end, and that’s what Paul is talking about. He runs straight toward the goal, and he calls it the prize. He knows his purpose. He is strengthened by God’s power to run, and so he runs for the prize, the prize of Christ, the prize of everything that he talked about in our passage, verses 2 through 16. He says it in another way in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, another amazing passage. Look at what he says. He says:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. (There is that language again.) Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

The context for this passage is a little different in Corinthians, but you see similar language. You see a similar idea. He is running toward the goal with purpose. He is not wasting energy. He is not boxing the air. He is not running, looking all around. He is headed for the goal. He runs straight.

He says, “One thing I focus on, forgetting what lies behind, reaching for what lies ahead, and what lies ahead is Christ.” It is the prize. It is the fullest relationship - with Christ - that we will have. When this life ends, there will be something greater, new heaven, a new earth. There is a prize waiting for us, and when we live as though the prize is wrapped up in our bank accounts, in our jobs, in our promotions, in what we see in front of us, then we are missing it, and we will live that discontented, joyless, faithless, fruitless life. We need our eyes focused on the goal, on the prize. And we don’t look over our shoulder at what’s coming.

Did you guys see the world championships? What a perfect picture! I wanted to show you the video of it, but you know ladies’ track uniforms are not the most modest, so I didn’t want to do that. But in the 10,000 meter, the former gold medal winner was the champion, and she was running, coming up to the end. She was in third place. She had third place on lock-down, and as she was running (the finish line was right there), she started putting up her hands, started slowing down, and her friend behind her came zooming right past right at the end and captured third place. What an image. Go look it up. It’s incredible. Even the announcer said there is a lesson in there. Yes, there is!

Guys, we just are tempted to let up off the gas pedal. We get good momentum, we get in the rhythm, and we are like, “Yes, things are going good.” And then we let off and we are like, “Okay, I got this. No need for any more power, God. I’m good. I’ll figure it out from here.” And then we start falling apart.

This isn’t about winning or losing the race. I believe, and I believe the bible is clear that when we are saved, that when God has captured us, that he doesn’t let us go. I think Paul teaches it. I think Peter teaches it and Jesus teaches it. I think everyone from Moses through the prophets teach it. It is more about what is life looking like for you day in and day out, and really proving that you are, proving in the sense that there needs to be evidence coming out of you, that God has in fact done what you said he’s done.

If it’s all about, “Well, I’m a Christian, but I’m not, and I just want to be this, and this, and this...” And we don’t want to shake the boat too much, and just want to look cool, and be hip, and not really talk about Jesus much, or sin much, well then there is a problem. There is a problem fundamentally with who we are and what we think we believe in and what we are telling the world is the place for that power and purpose, and really, what the prize is: the prize is Christ. And he’s beautiful. And

Paul says he's beautiful. He says it's surpassing worth! So many things in our life we look at and say, "That's surpassing worth." "Yeah, Christ you're good, but that also is great." We need help. Paul doesn't look back. He doesn't rely on his former achievements, and he doesn't let former failures change his course. His eyes are fixed tightly on the finish line.

One of the commentators says this. He says, "In this sense he forgets as he runs. He is running, and he is forgetting, but he is still going forward." It's this perfect image of forgetting and running forward. We need this, guys. We often base our current situation on what's happened in the past, both our successes and our failures. Failures. We could think, "God would never bless me because of what I did." Or even our successes. "Look what I've done. Surely God will bless me. Why isn't he blessing me?" The gospel frees us. It frees us from constantly trying to fight for position with God. It frees us to run the race, as the author of Hebrews says, "...by laying aside every weight and sin that just slows us down." We lay those aside and we run towards the prize. We run the race set before us. It frees us to forget.

You can forget what lies behind. Not because Adam said so, but because God said so. I'm not saying it doesn't matter. I'm not saying it doesn't impact your life now, but it can be forgotten, in the sense that it is in the past. You do not rely on those things anymore, whether they be good or bad, but you run forward. Those things do not define us, those things that we are constantly tempted to trust in, or the things that we think make us significant. We leave them behind and we strain, we fight, we reach forward, eyes fixed on the goal. We need to remember these things, guys, as we run, as we fight.

Are you a parent? How to remember -- this is going to fill your soul. Are you married? Are you single? Do you work in a job? Do you have to deal with money issues? Do you have to deal with relational issues? With time issues? We need to remember. Are you allowing yourself, first of all, to forget what lies behind and reach forward? Are you allowing others in your life to forget what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead?

Ambition -- we talked about it in the beginning - it's not a bad thing. Sometimes we shy back from it. We say, "Ambition - that's what business people do, that's not what Christians do." I don't think so. I think godly ambition and ambition that keeps Christ at the center is something that we should want and strive for, and it forces us to move forward and progress and grow. But every day in life we are confronted with situations where all of this is tested, and we are forced to answer some

Unbroken Joy - A Pressing Ambition

Philippians 3:1-16 | Sunday, September 27, 2015 | By Adam Greenfield



questions. Am I living with purpose? With the right purpose? What are my ambitions? Are my priorities in order? What holds the most power in my life? What am I trusting in for power, for the power that I need? Are my eyes focused on the prize of Christ? May God help us to live this. Let's pray.