

Paul's Resolution

Philippians 3:14

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FOCAL Read Together **Philippians 3:14** I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

I read an interesting piece the other day by a man named **Stephen Covey**. In that piece he wrote that - as humans - we cannot control 90% of what happens in our lives, but we can control how we respond to that 90%.

David the Christian is sitting at the breakfast table. He is dressed for work when his little girl knocks over his cup of coffee so that it spills all over him. *Reacting* to the situation rather than running for the Lord David speaks harshly to his daughter and she begins to cry. When David's wife intervenes he ungraciously chews her out for putting the coffee where the child could reach it. Now life goes from bad to worse. As David and his wife argue with one another and the daughter cries no one notices until too late that the school bus has departed. David's daughter needs a ride to school. David changes his shirt, takes his daughter to school, and then heads to work. Arriving 10 minutes late David misses an important meeting and has to endure a chewing out from his boss. What a miserable day!

The day could have been much better. Every Christian - saved by the grace of God and the Blood of the Lamb - is called to live their lives for the Lord Jesus. The Apostle Paul in today's text likens the Christian way of life to a *race*, and the Christian as a *runner*.

A runner in a race is suppose to act like a runner. He

is suppose to stay on course, to stay between the lines, to focus on the goal, and *to run no matter what*. A runner is not an observer, nor is he a judge. He is to run and keep on running until he breaks the tape.

Had David **pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God** his day could have been much better. When his daughter spilled the coffee he could have gotten up, kissed her on the forehead and forgiven her error, remembering the Scripture

Ephesians 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Responding in a Christlike manner David could have went and put on a clean shirt, left the house, and gotten to work on time. Then he would have missed being chewed out himself.

Matthew 7:2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

If you are a born again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ your faith is not just for *show*, it is for *go*. You are called by God to **press toward the mark** for the Lord Jesus, to *live out* your faith by letting God *live through you*.

When Alvin C. York - a relatively new Christian -

received his notice that he was being drafted into the Army his initial response was to "go back into the hills". Alvin said "**the Book tells me that 'thou shalt not kill'**". His Pastor told him, "**Alvin, some people have the meeting house kind of faith and others have the living kind of faith. I reckon that you have the *living kind of faith*.**" Alvin York did serve his country in World War I. He followed the Lord Who saved him, **pressing toward the mark for the prize** at all times. Because Alvin York humbled himself and ran the race before him he won the Congressional Medal of Honor. God honors - and protects - those who honor Him.

Do you have the *meeting house* kind of faith, or the *living* kind of faith. God wants you to have the kind of faith that grows and goes.

1 John 5:4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

May God impress your hearts this New Year with His Word.

**1. You Can Be A Spectator Or A Runner
But A Spectator Never Wins A Medal**

FOCAL **Philippians 3:14** I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

I want to say this again: **you can be a spectator or a runner, but a spectator never wins a medal from the judge of the race.** If you're a Christian you are called to

run - and keep on running - for the Lord.

I press toward the mark

Who is "I"? This is none other than the **Apostle Paul**. Paul was one of the most used men in all of Christian history. Paul the Apostle went into all types of situations - friendly and unfriendly - to preach the Gospel of salvation and to establish New Testament Churches.

Was Paul appreciated for his efforts? Absolutely not! But the point of the race is to win it - not to please the non-runners!

Hated By His People, He Ran Who were Paul's enemies? Paul used to be a member of the Ruling Council of the Jewish Elders called the **Sanhedrin**. When he became a Christian the Sanhedrin blacklisted him as a traitor, and his family turned against him.

2 Corinthians 11:24 **Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.**

A person couldn't be hit with a whip more than *thirty nine times* in a particular beating session. Five times Paul was beaten with whips. Through those five times he received **195 lashes of the whip**. Can you imagine how his back looked? When we tell somebody about Jesus and they call us *intolerant* we go away with our bottom lip hanging out. When Paul told someone about Jesus there were many times he went away with torn flesh and bloodied clothing.

Yet Paul pressed on (διωκω pronounced *dee-o'-ko*) **toward the mark**. He kept on doing what God assigned him to do! He didn't take time out to bemoan his aches and pains, nor did he spend time hating those that attacked him.

A runner runs, and Paul ran. He constantly looked toward the finish line of Heaven knowing that one day he would stand before His Savior and Lord.

2 Corinthians 11:25 **Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned**

Though the Jews had a rule about how many times they could hit with whips in a beating session there was no such rule on using **rods** and **stones**. The intent of these implements were to kill. **Rods broke bones, stones snuffed out life**. In order to stone a person you needed (1) the victim, (2) a large crowd of people, and (3) a bunch of stones. When a person was stoned they were usually beaten with rods first in an attempt to break their legs. Then they were dragged out of the city. This happened to ..

Paul at Lystra Acts 14:19-21 **And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. [20] Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. [21] And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had**

taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

Paul was not only stoned with the intent of killing him, but he was *tossed out of the city like so much garbage*. What did Paul do afterward? He **went and preached in Derbe, then went right back and preached in the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioche.**

It was **Jewish unbelievers from Iconium and Antioche** that led the crowds to stone Paul in the first place, but he went right back to **Iconium and Antioche** and continued doing what God told him to do.

Hated By The Gentiles, Paul Ran The Roman **Authorities** considered Paul to be a subversive and a traitor to the empire. Paul said:

2 Corinthians 11:25 thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;

The reason Paul was in a shipwreck was because he was being transported to Rome to be judged before Caesar. Paul would eventually lose his head - literally - when Caesar ordered his death. Yet Paul continued to preach, to **run his race set before him**. Paul **kept on stretching forward to the goal**.

Paul didn't waste time worrying, being angry, or in *trying to be God*. Paul just ran. Do you know what

you call a runner who stops running before he reaches the goal? A *loser*. God did not save you to make you into a loser - run for Jesus!

Run, Christian, run the race set before you! Run for God, not for man.

1 Corinthians 7:23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

We run our race for the Lord. We run the race to hear His "**well done**", not to hear the world's *well done*. Press toward the goal trusting the Lord your God - and you will be blessed and be a blessing.

2. As A Runner You Must Do Your Best For There Are Spectators Watching You

FOCAL Philippians 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Word Study The word "press" is the Greek *Present Active Indicative* of (δύωκω **pronounced:** dee-o'-ko), and means "**to keep on pressing or stretching toward, to press on**".

The *New International, New American Standard, Revised Standard, and World English Versions* all render this as "**I press on toward the goal**". We cannot stop running before we reach our goal - and we never reach the goal in this life.

CONTEXT **Philippians 3:12** **Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on, if it is so that I may take hold of that for which also I was taken hold of by Christ Jesus.**

The Apostle Paul is one of the greatest Christians who ever lived, but he said "**I don't consider myself to have reached the finish line. I'm not perfect by any means. I haven't arrived. I press on!**"

You keep on running, because the race you're in matters. The world and the worldly are watching you. If your life in Christ doesn't impress the spectator nobody will want to be like YOU.

ILLUSTRATE Many a child watches a sports figure and dreams of growing up to be like that person. Many a young basketball player wanted to grow up and be like Michael Jordan. Years ago a young boy - disappointed because his team was found guilty of throwing games - said "**say it ain't so, Joe**". The young boy's heart was broken. Recently the top ranked golfer **Tiger Woods** shocked his family and his fans when it was discovered he had been actively in sexual sin with several mistresses. Woods lost a number of endorsements as his credibility was shattered. Dear friends, what the Christian does is much more important than what a sports figure does. **We want to live our lives in such a way that others will be drawn to - and not repelled from - Christ.** What we do matters, and *we are being watched.*

The world has heard the militant *gay and lesbian rights* organizations present their causes. It has heard the militant *feminist rights* organizations parade and promote unrestrained abortion. Yet the only time the world hears from Christians is when it hears our fights and our foolishness. The unbelieving world keeps running its race while too many Christians sit on the sidelines looking nostalgically backward at "a simpler time when things made sense". Dear friends, you can't win a race or outrun a monster by looking backward. What you did in the past is in the past. Focus on your goal and **run for Jesus.**

The Apostle said:

CONTEXT **Philippians 3:13** **Brothers, I don't regard myself as yet having taken hold, but one thing I do. Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before,**

Keep moving forward, for what you do matters. **The good old days - as well as the bad old days - are over. Let them go!** Keep running for Jesus. Keep telling others about the glorious Gospel of salvation. Keep on living for the Lord, for people don't know the power of the Gospel unless they see it lived out in you.

ILLUSTRATE A Kindergarten teacher asked her students to draw a picture of someone they know. She went past one little boy and stopped, looking at his

picture. "Tommy, who is that?" Little Tommy replied, "That's my picture of God". The teacher said "Honey, God is a Spirit. Nobody really knows what He looks like." Tommy kept on drawing, and said "They'll know when I'm through drawing my picture."

What People Need Is Jesus The pursuit of the Hebrew was **LIGHT**. The pursuit of the Greek was **KNOWLEDGE**. The pursuit of the Roman was **GLORY**. All of these pursuits - **LIGHT**, **GLORY**, and **KNOWLEDGE** - meet in Jesus Christ. The Bible says:

2 Corinthians 4:6-7 For **God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. [7] But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.**

God is in the Christian - He is in US. God's **LIGHT** is revealed by how we run our race. People receive the **KNOWLEDGE** of God through we who run. The lost see the **GLORY** of God revealed in us. We run, looking forward, trusting in the Lord of the race. **Charles Stanley** wrote in his book *Living In The Power Of The Holy Spirit*:

"The question we must each ask ourselves is not *How much potential do I have?* but rather *Am I living in the fullness of my potential?* The answer is always no. Each one of us can still become more and do more than we are at the present. We never reach the limits of what we can do in Jesus Christ. There is always

more for the believer. How can this be? Because an unlimited God has chosen to indwell us."

What you do - dear Christian - matters. It matters to God, matters to this city, matters to this nation, and matters to this world.

3. As A Runner You Must Be Willing To Sacrifice If You Want To Win The Race

ILLUSTRATE Frances of Assisi was a very dedicated Christian in the early Church. One day he came down with a disease in one of his eyes. Frances went to a local physician who informed him that he had seen such things before, and if left untreated the disease would spread from one eye to the other and eventually blind him. Frances asked the physician what needed to be done. The physician said that the only treatment was to *cauterize* the eye with a red hot iron. As Frances willingly sat still the physician - without any type of anesthesia - took a glowing red hot iron from the fire and pressed it into his eyeball. Frances' face contorted with the agony of the treatment and it took him several months to fully recover. Someone asked him later how it was possible for him to stand such a terrible treatment. Frances replied, **"When I became a servant of Christ I expected more pain than a burning eyeball"**.

Christianity is not about being served, it's about serving. It's not about selfishness, it's about selflessness. It's not about getting, but it's about giving. Just as running takes something out of you,

living for Jesus will cost you something.

No runner will reach the goal who does not suffer in the race. Suffering must not stop us from running our race for Jesus. I for one do not want to live in that gray twilight world of those who try nothing and win nothing. If you are not willing to keep on running through the dark valleys of life you will never reach the mount of victory. **You must move outside of your comfort zone if you want to make a difference for Christ in this world.**

God raised Moses in the Palace, but He didn't use him in the *Palace of Egypt* but put him to work in the *desert*. God raised Joseph in the *desert*, but He didn't use him in the desert. God put Joseph to work in the *Palace of Egypt*. Why is that? Because the race God has us in takes us outside of our comfort zone. Spectators can be comfortable sitting on the sidelines eating peanuts. You are called to run, not watch, to strive, not relax, and to let the Living God use you for His glory.

It is often quite painful to run for the Lord. Jesus told us that running for Him might cost us our friends, our family, and perhaps even our very lives. He said:

John 15:18-20 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. [19] If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the

world, therefore the world hateth you. [20]

Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

My dear mother called the other day because she was concerned. She heard me preaching against sin and for the Gospel and she was concerned that I might be persecuted - even hated - for what I said. That may be. People are going to hate the Gospel. They are not going to embrace *repentance from sin and coming to Christ*. Jesus said:

John 3:18-20 He that believeth on {Jesus} is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. [19] And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. [20] For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

Nobody likes being told that they're wrong. Nobody likes being told that they are sinners. The world will strive against you. Your friends and family may hate you. Run the race anyway!

Keep on running though it is painful to run.

Rick Warren said:

"Notice the term Paul uses in verse 12: "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me". [This] literally means "I over extend myself - I go for it with all I've got".

Run the race with all that you've got. Run without looking backwards. Keep your eyes on the goal - the salvation of as many as will come to Jesus Christ believing.

May God touch your hearts with His Word.



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Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 7:2

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2 Corinthians 11:24; 2 Corinthians 11:25; Acts 14:19-21; 2 Corinthians 11:25; 1 Corinthians 7:23

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Philippians 3:14; Philippians 3:12; Philippians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 4:6

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