

Press On

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 July 2016

[0:00] Have you ever run a race?

Yeah, so good. I think Julie told me one day she ran this race and she came in fourth or something! Or sixth, but there were six people in the race.

Have you ever run a race like a real cross-country race? That used to be my favourite at school. The challenge of that run despite all the obstacles and all the difficulties running whether the weather was foul or wintry and the satisfaction of crossing that finishing line, of finishing my course. Paul tells of such a running, of such a race that we are called to. In Philippians 3, from verse 13 through 14, he says, brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.

In other words, he counted that he hadn't achieved that, that he sought for, that he aspired to.

[1:47] He was still on the journey. He was still on that running race. He hadn't arrived yet, is what he's saying here. And here he is, as he wrote this, some reckoned that he was some thirty years after his conversion.

The great apostle Paul, the one who was so used of God in the early church as one of the leaders and pioneers of the faith.

One who wrote much of the New Testament as the Lord moved on him to write it. He was thirty years old as a Christian, yet he still says, brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.

He still says, I'm still on that running track. I'm still running that race. I've still got a way to go. And we've still a race to run, brother, sister, tonight.

We may be a seasoned Christian. Perhaps we've tried and failed and been disappointed. Take heart. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.

[2:55] Paul hadn't apprehended. Paul hadn't realised it yet. He hadn't laid hold of it yet. He was still on the journey. And there's a long way to go for all of us as Christians tonight.

We haven't arrived yet. None of us have. Not yet. And for the meantime, we've a race to run. We've that track yet to go through. And so how are we to run this race of ours?

I put to you three things. Firstly, having the right focus. Paul says, but this one thing I do.

Paul tells here of having the right focus for life. This one thing I do. It was a spiritual focus for Paul. And he maintained his focus with determination and consistency. Focus. It's a marathon event. It's a long distance event.

[3:56] It's a cross country event. We are called to this. We have a clear focus. Hebrews 12.2. It says, Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now the writer of Hebrews said of that same truth, of that right focus. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher. He starts it and he finishes it.

Our faith. Our salvation. And when we have this sharp focus for our life, we will not be detoured or sidetracked. And we'll avoid those distractions.

We won't be deterred because we've erased the run. And we've got that right focus. Some may threaten to throw you off track. Even just driving along.

One night recently, the other night, I had a driver driving towards me with his full high beam on. I just had to maintain my focus.

[5:06] Didn't look at his lights. I looked at the road. I looked at the destination. I just had to maintain my focus and not be deterred.

And it's like that in the Christian life, isn't it? We don't need... We will get these distractions. We will get these obstacles. We will get these opposing, distracting situations.

But we have to maintain our focus. I think of some who seem to have lost their focus. It's a sad thing to see people lose their focus.

I had correspondence with a man of late who professes to follow Christ. And I noticed that he was missing from fellowship. And when I contacted him, he explained his reason.

He had a reason. Excuse me. His children play soccer on Sundays. His boys play soccer on Sundays.

[6:05] And so he was not able to come to fellowship. His was a different focus, I'll put to you. A different focus now. It was more important to this man that his children go and kick a leather ball on a piece of grass than that he be the man of God for his family, for his household, and bring his children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Fathers, mothers, the judgment will be upon our head for neglecting our soul. And for failing this one thing. This one thing I do. There's other teams you can join to play soccer.

You don't have to stop your boys playing soccer, but get them to church. How will they ever hear the gospel? How will they be encouraged? How will they ever develop the habit of attending fellowship if we neglect these things?

And of the example of that man. Paul says, this one thing I do. He had a right focus. We'll get to the second one which is right forgetting.

But Paul talks of pressing on. Of having the right focus. Of the right focus. And so, this one thing I do. And secondly, there is a sense of pressing on with a right forgetting.

[7:30] A right forgetting. A right forgetting. You know, it's sometimes helpful to forget some things. Not usually, but if you ever lost something, which I tend to make a habit of doing.

But there are some things it's good to forget about, isn't it? Isn't that right? A right forgetting. Paul says, forgetting those things which are behind.

Forgetting those things which are behind. You know, there's an advantage in having a forgetfulness of some things. And Paul said he put some things behind him. He had much that he could have boasted of.

All of his credentials. His training. His heritage. His lineage. His wealth of knowledge that he had. But he said he put it all behind him.

In Philippians 3 verse 7 he says, But what things were gained to me. Those I counted loss for Christ. Pharisee of the Pharisees.

[8:29] Those things that were gained to me. I counted loss for Christ. You know, friends, brothers and sisters. We are to leave some things behind us. Leave some things behind us.

You know, there's a sense where we are to let go of childish things. When I became a man, I put away childish things. You've got grown adults walking around playing this Pokemon Go or whatever.

I don't even know what it is. I don't want to know. No. I put away childish things when I became a man. Yeah. I was playing with such fanciful things.

Life's too precious. Time's too short to play such foolish things. When I became a man, I put away childish things.

When I was a boy, I used to have a stamp collection, a stone collection, a metal collection, you name it. An aircraft books collection, put it all away. I wasn't interested anymore.

[9:28] When I became a man, I put away childish things. There's a right forgetting, forgetting those things which are behind. And there's a sense where we are to go on, go on in Christ, go on in Christian maturity.

Leaving the past behind you. Brother, sister, it's time to mature in Christ. Leaving those things behind you. Don't look back. You know, there's a pastor who told a story of how his father was a high school coach.

And he said how this father had many words of advice, both off and on the track. But when it came to running races and relays, there was one thing above all others that this father, this coach, told his son.

He said run as fast as you can and whatever you do, don't look back. Run as fast as you can, whatever you do, don't look back.

That was this coach's advice. The reason is threefold. He said, first, looking back during a race breaks your concentration. Second, it breaks your flow.

[10:41] Third, it slows you down. On May the 6th, 1954, Roger Bannister became the first man in history to break the four-minute mark of running the mile.

He broke it. He ran it less than four minutes. First time in history. Within two months, another man, John Landy, eclipsed the record by 1.4 seconds.

On August 7, 1954, the two met together for the first time on the track for a historic race. And as they moved into the last lap, Landy held the lead.

It looked like he would win. But as he neared the finish line, he was haunted by the question, where is Bannister? How close is Bannister?

And as he turned to look, Bannister took the lead. And Landy told later the Time magazine, if I hadn't looked back, if I hadn't looked back, I would have won.

[11:43] Now, Paul says, letting go of those things which are behind.

Letting go of those things which are behind. Brothers, sisters, let go of those distractions that hold you back from running this race. Let go of those things.

Those past failures. Those past fears. Those bad habits. Your defeats. Your losses. Your regrets. Your shame. There's some things you don't need to hang on to anymore. Let it go. The persistent pains in your life. I've got one of those at the moment.

It's not my life. But I've got some persistent pains in my life. People are at pain. There's people like that.

[12:41] It can get you down, can't it? The heartaches. The heartaches. The headaches. The people who keep hurting you. They want to drag you back to where they are.

Way, way back. Not even on the track. Leave them behind you. Leave them behind you. You've got a race to run. There's some right forgetting that we need to do.

In 1845, the ill-fated Franklin Expedition sailed from England to find a safe passage across the Arctic Ocean.

1845. 1845. The crew loaded up these two sailing ships with a load of things. They had a 1,200 volume library. Fine china.

Crystal goblets. And sterling silverware. Everything laid on. A lot of things they didn't need for this Arctic voyage.

[13:40] Each officer had a special goblet that was engraved with their initials. A silver goblet had their initials engraved on it.

And amazingly, each ship took only a 12-day supply of coal for their auxiliary steam engines. They only had a limited amount of coal, of fuel.

And then these ships became trapped in the Arctic ice. And these vast frozen plains of ice. And after several months, Lord Franklin died. And the men decided to trek to safety in small groups, but none of them survived.

And one story is especially heartbreaking, that two officers pulled a large sled more than 65 miles across the treacherous ice. And when rescuers found their bodies, they discovered that the sled was filled with table silver.

Oh. They were very rich people. Uh-huh. But dead. Those men contributed to their own demise by carrying what they didn't need. What about us?

[14:43] Do we carry what we don't need? All that baggage. All of those things from behind us. Paul says, forgetting those things that are behind. Those grudges.

Those weights. You know, the writer of Hebrews tells of laying aside every weight. It speaks of sin. Those things that drag us down. That weigh us down.

That hold us back from running the Christian race. Hebrews 12. 1. We're foreseen. We are encompassed about. With so great a cloud of witnesses.

Let us lay aside every weight. And the sin which doth so easily beset us. And let us run with patience the race that is set before us.

Let us run with patience. Let us run with endurance. Let us run with perseverance. This race that is set before us. For some, there's things we need to let go of.

[15:39] That are holding us down. Holding us back. It may be things we're ashamed of. Maybe there's things in our past that still have a grip on us. We're a Christian.

It's in God's sea of forgetfulness. He's forgotten about it. And so should we. Those things that we've done that we're ashamed of. The guilt from the past.

We keep harking back to it. To some fault. To some sin. We consider ourselves unworthy. I'm not fit to serve God. But we've not lived up.

We've not lived up to our Christian calling, you might say. I'm going to drop out of the race because I've got all this stuff hanging on to me. No, brother.

No, sister. Forgetting those things that are behind. It's all the more reason to get back in the race. It's all the more reason to get back on the racetrack.

[16:39] There's some need for forgetting to do. So Paul's hooks are pressing on. Of having the right focus. This one thing I do. And then he talks pressing on.

Of the right kind of forgetting. Leaving those things behind. And thirdly. Reaching forth. Reaching forth.

He says. And reaching forth unto those things which are before. A right focus. This one thing I do. A right forgetting.

Leaving those things behind. And reaching forth. Reaching forth unto those things which are before. We reach forth. We reach forth. We press on. We press forward.

Heaven is before us. He's made it our home. By his grace. The saints have gone before us. May I our witnesses on this great spectacle of life.

[17:37] This great gathering of clouds of witnesses around us. Around us. As it were. The angels watch on. As it were. In this great contest of our lives.

And there's a leaning forward. A reaching forward. A straining. Because we have a hope for tomorrow. We have hope for tomorrow. We reach forward.

We don't get held back. Now remember Lot's wife. She looked back. Don't look back to the world. And it's toys and joys. They're empty and vain.

And fleeting. And passing. Look forward. Reach forward. We press forward. I press toward the mark. I press toward the mark.

For the prize. This race calls for our best. It calls for our utmost. It calls for our most. This race calls us to give and keep on giving.

[18:34] This race calls for a pursuit of excellence. Let us not give God just our small change. Let us not give God our half-heartedness.

Let us not give God our token attention. I press toward the mark. For the prize. We are called to this.

To perseverance. What does it take to put you off? What will it take? Nothing should put you off. Nothing but nothing should deter you. Let me share another illustration. Just to try to demonstrate this truth.

The young William Wilberforce was a member of parliament in England. One of the few who stood for Christ. He was an out-and-out Christian.

[19:34] And stood strongly for the law in that time of the early 1790s. And discouraged one night. The young William Wilberforce had another defeat.

He was one of the few. He was one of the few. And many were against him. As he tried to stand against the slave trade. The wicked slave trade of its day in England.

Ten years he battled on. And there's another disappointment. Oh. Another blow. Another loss. Another discouragement. And tired and frustrated this day. He opened his Bible.

And he began to leaf through it. Feeling, whoa. I'm so discouraged here. And as he leafed through that Bible.

A small piece of paper fell out. And fluttered to the floor. It was a letter written to him by John Wesley. Shortly before Wesley's death. And Wilberforce read this letter.

[20:32] And this is what it said. Unless the divine power has raised you up. I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise. In

opposing that abominable practice of slavery.

Which is the scandal of religion. Of England and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up. For this very thing. You will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils.

But. But if God. Before you. Who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? Oh be not weary in well doing. Go on. In the name of God. And in the power of his might. Go on. In the name of God. And in the power of his might.

And Wilberforce did go on. And God blessed. And those ungodly. Laws were changed. And slavery was wiped out.

[21:37] I pressed toward the mark. That's what we need to do brothers and sisters. It's simple really isn't it? Go on. Go on man. Go on woman.

In the good grace of God. Go on. And God will run. With you. You will run your race well. This race it calls for us to give of our very best.

This race calls us to press forward. To press toward the mark. To expend every fibre of our being. To press forward. Now we heard of a missionary.

In the prayer time. People give of their. Their life blood. Go on. Press on.

Stay the course. Press on. Invest in your life's energy. Your soul's strength. Invest yourself. Press on. Seeking to win your family.

[22:39] Seeking to lead your family. Caring for the souls of men. All around about you. More than your physical comforts. And your convenience. Do we care for the souls of men?

Or do we not? 2 Timothy 4. Paul writes again. I've fought a good fight. I've finished my course. I've run. He says.

I've finished my course. I've kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me. A crown of righteousness. Which the Lord. The righteous judge. Shall give me at that day.

And not to me only. But unto all them. Also that love is appearing. I press toward the mark. I've finished my course.

I've run the race. I've got laid up for me. A crown of righteousness. The Lord. The righteous judge. Will give to me. And not to me only. But unto all them. That love is appearing. Friends.

[23:38] There's a crown ahead. Go forward. There's a crown ahead. There's a rejoicing. It's just around the corner. You're almost turning that final stretch.

And you can hear the crowd roar. As you're about to enter the stadium. The finishing line is just moments away. Life is a vapour, isn't it? How long have you got?

Well. The finishing line draws ever nearer. Let's finish well. Finish strong. You see the footage of those competing in the Olympics.

You see the energy expended. You see the muscles tested and stretched to the nth degree. The strain on their faces.

In the sinews. In the expressions. The contortion of their faces. As they endure such labour. And such strenuous effort.

[24:44] In these events. The discipline. The diligence. The effort. 1 Corinthians 9.25.

Paul says. And every man that striveth for the Master is temperate in all things. Now they do it. To obtain a corruptible crown. But we.

An incorruptible. These people in the Olympics. They get some little piece of metal to hang around their neck. Big deal.

We have an incorruptible crown. Now in the old athletic games of the day. They would receive a wreath of leaves.

Or some neatly plaited. Such device to stick on their head. But it would fade away. It would dry and crumble. And wither. Corrupt.

[25:44] They do it to obtain a corruptible crown. But we. An incorruptible. Our crown will never corrupt. It will be everlasting. And so the crown we will receive will not perish. But friends.

For the meantime. We're in a race. Amen. And we have to press on. Press on. Press on.

Regardless. You may see others drop by the wayside.

Press on. Forgetting those things which are behind. Some will drop out because of some petty reason. Some petty difference. Some petty disagreement. Some may consider other things more important.

Such as a soccer game. Some will lose their focus. The love of many will wax cold.

We're outnumbered. By the majority who don't care. Let us press on. Press on. There may be times we ourselves may feel defeated.

[26:42] We may feel like quitting. Keep pressing on sister. Keep pressing on brother. There is no time now to slacken the pace. This is no time for that.

But rather to press harder. To press stronger. To press more faithfully. To press ahead. More determined. In this race that we have to run. Run with patience it says.

With endurance. Perseverance. Endure hardship. This race calls for an intensity of effort. Friends. Be exhorted tonight. Be encouraged today.

This aspect of a race. It's a long distance event. Isn't it? You know. For some it's like. They're like a firecracker. They start off with a lot of enthusiasm.

And then it just. Fizzles out. It's like they're thinking the Christian life is a sprint. But really it's a marathon. It's a cross country.

[27:38] It's an obstacle course. It's a long distance event. And we must aim for the goal ahead. And meantime. The Lord is working on us. You know. It says that the path of the just. Goes brighter and brighter.

Until the perfect day. We've got. A bit of growing to do. A bit of going. Forward to do. We've got. More of a track to run. And we're here to go the distance.

So don't drop out of the race. When you are facing opposition. Or discouragement. It's normal. Now what does the Olympic athlete do?

They get up again. And get on the track. And practice again. How much more we. As those who are. Aspiring to. Serve our precious saviour.

And please him. And of the crown. The prize ahead. We're running for a prize. That is incorruptible. We're running for the prize. We have a prize before us. So the time now. Is to be pressing on.

[28:39] Note the exertion here. My press. Toward the mark. For the prize. Of the high calling. Of God. In Christ Jesus. He calls us here. Paul. To maximum effort. There's an exertion here.

Just go on. Go on. You know. By perseverance. The snow. Reached the ark. So said Spurgeon. You know.

By perseverance. Yeah. It took that snail. A long long time. Maybe. To get onto that ark. Amen. But by perseverance. The snail reached the ark. And so we turn.

You might think. Oh. I just can't get there. You know. It's a long distance event. Keep going. Towards the finishing line. We have a high calling.

It says. A high calling. I press toward the mark. For the prize. Of the high calling. Of God. In Christ Jesus. We have a high calling. There's a certain discipline here.

[29:35] God has saved us. With a high. A holy. A heavenly calling. And so his desire. In saving us. Is not that we. Continue to live like the world.

Let's honour the Lord. With how we live our lives. It's a high. A holy. A heavenly calling. There's none greater. None more higher.

More mighty. More noble. Than this calling. That you had. He's called us out of darkness. Into his glorious light. He's called us into his kingdom.

Out of the kingdom of darkness. And he's made us his sons. His daughters. His children. His servants. So let us live our lives with honour. And with purpose today.

Be encouraged. As we just quickly recap. This one thing. I do. Paul boils it down to this one thing.

[30:31] I do. It's simple isn't it? A B C. This one thing. I do. Let nothing hold you back. From this one thing. Break through. Your limitations.

Break through. Those barriers. Those obstacles. Those things. That are holding you back. Having that right focus. Looking unto Jesus.

A life lived to the glory of God. The Christian life is the best life we can live. Isn't it? You see those in the world.

Who get acclaim. From men. Who get acclaim. From the media. Or. The populace. The paparazzi chase them everywhere.

Because they're so sought after. To be on the front page. Of the next magazine. The Christian life. Is the best life we can live. None of that. It's rubbish.

[31:30] A life lived to the glory of God. That's what matters. It's an obstacle race people. It's a marathon. A cross country marathon. And you're going to get. Some mud puddles.

And some fences to jump over. And some things to go uphill. And down dale. And it's going to be. Hard yakking.

The Christian life. There's a struggle. There's a fight to it. There's that intent to it at times. As much as. That battle is the Lord's. And not ours.

And as much as. He's our running partner. As it were. And we keep pace with him. Not only is he at the finishing line. But I believe in a sense. He's there. Spurring us on.

Alongside us. Running alongside us. As it were. That's the picture that I. Get. For myself sometimes. When I think of. The Christian race. That we run. And sure enough.

[32:27] It may be a fight. It may be a marathon. A struggle. An endurance event. And yet. You might feel. Being honest with me tonight. Like you're lagging.

Or you're sitting by the sidelines. Maybe. A bit puffed out. Just need to have it. Breathing. And. Get back on track. Get back on track. Get back on the race track.

Brother. Sister. This is your race. Your race. The race that you have to run. And so be encouraged today. The right focus. Looking unto Jesus. This one thing I do.

The right forgetting. Forgetting those things which are behind. Don't let anything drag you back there. Don't even look back there. It's gone. God's buried it in the sea of his forgetfulness.

All the sin. All the shame. All the guilt. All the lack. Leave it behind. Don't let it drag you down. And that reaching forth.

[33:25] Pressing toward the mark. For the prize of the high calling of God. In Christ Jesus. There's a crown. For all then. That love is appearing. Don't you want Jesus to appear?

Could it be tonight? His presence. To appear. To see him. To see his face. To all them that love his appearing. It says there's a crown. Amen.

Glory to God. And as some have said. We could cast out at his feet. You know. It's not the crown we run for. But it's for his favour. Isn't it? For his face. For his grace.

By his mercy. By his strength. And so. This is your race. Run it well. Finish strong. Let us pray. Amen. Our Lord God and King.

We thank you. Our Saviour and Master. That you are. As it were. Running with us. You've already run the race. And you're waiting ahead. And we're looking unto you Lord.

[34:22] The author. And the finisher of the race. Lord. Of our faith. Lord. We pray. Help each one. As we know. We all struggle. We all have. Difficulties.

And opposition. And reasons why it's hard. And Lord. It's easy to get. Detoured. And distracted. And discouraged. We know the enemy.

Wants to drag us back. Where we came from. And pull us down. Defeat us. Yet we know Lord. He is defeated already. And we have victory in Christ. Help us Lord.

To. To press on. Toward the mark. For the prize. The high calling of God. In Christ Jesus. Help us Lord. To have that heart. That intent. That.

Devotion. That determination. Help each one. If there's any here. Defeated or discouraged. They've been going through. Some tough things Lord. They've. Maybe taken a few steps.

[35:18] Backward in this race. And. They just need to be. Lifted up. And encouraged. We want to come alongside them. And lift them up. And put our arms under their. Arms Lord.

And lift them up. Help them to get back on the track. We pray Lord. For. We know your word says that. We should restore such a one. When people are.

Are. Struggling. Because we all can be tempted. And we all can fail. And Lord help us. None of us to think more highly.

Than we ought to think. But to know that we all humbly. Need your grace. And we need your grace. Every step of this track. That we run. We pray Lord. That you help those that.

Have fallen by the wayside. We pray you help them get back on track. Help us Lord. We pray. Help us to make. Have that discipline. That we see in.

[36:12] The worldly athletes. That nothing will stop them. Nothing will stop them Lord. And likewise too. That in this. This discipleship. This Christian walk. This Christian race.

That we'll have that same. Devotion. More so. Because we know. The prize is ever more. Wonderful. Not that we work for our salvation.

But. That our salvation works for us. That we can see our salvation. Is working out. And it's being worked in us. By your spirit. Lord we pray.

Stir us up. Stir us up. To be that people. In Jesus name. Amen. Thank you.