

Go For the Gold

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[0 : 00] Some of my favorite quotes of all time have to be from Yogi Berra. Yogi was a baseball catcher and ultimately a baseball manager and coach.

And his sayings became so known, they became known as yogi-isms. They were quirky, they were unusual, but they were often very philosophical.

Here are just a few of them. One time he said, nobody goes to that restaurant anymore. It's too crowded. If people don't want to come out to the ballpark, nobody's going to stop them.

One time somebody asked Yogi what time it was. His response, you mean now? Yogi was also asked one time about his philosophy of life.

You want to know what Yogi's philosophy of life was? He said, when you come to a fork in the road, take it. Makes sense? Maybe.

[1 : 14] He said, I don't want to make the wrong mistake. As if there was a right mistake to make. Also, he said, if you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else.

You know, there's actually a lot of truth in some of these statements. And for that last statement, spiritually speaking, if we don't know where we're going, we'll truly end up somewhere else.

It's important to have a goal. And as we talked about in the last few weeks, it's important to have our eyes on that goal. If we just spend our lives drifting spiritually, hoping that we'll end up where we want to, we're truly deceiving ourselves.

And we don't want to be deceived in this life, of course. So finishing the race of this life well, as we've talked about, requires a sanctified dissatisfaction of where we are in our spiritual life.

Understanding that we'll always have room for growth. We'll always have the opportunity to learn more, be drawn closer to the Lord Jesus, be discontented with our current level of spiritual maturity.

[2 : 46] Also, our devotion to Christ Jesus. We need to be devoted to him. Have the single mind and a future-oriented direction.

And the last two requirements we're going to be looking at this morning. We're so glad that you're with us this morning for today's time of worship in God's Word.

Let's listen to the determination in the Apostle Paul's voice as we read in the book of Philippians, chapter number 3. And today we're going to be in verses 14, 15, and 16.

In verse number 14, we read, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, let us, as many as are mature, have this mind. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

[3 : 55] Nevertheless, to the degree that you have already attained, let us walk by the same rule. Let us be of the same mind.

Before we delve into God's Word this morning, let's take a few moments and talk to our Heavenly Father. Our Father, we thank you for this day.

I thank you for your goodness and your provision. And even during this time where we may be, may have to be separated from one another because of this current situation and may be forced to become idle, or help us not to waste that opportunity to be still, to listen to what we hear, to be in the moment, and to realize that you exist, and that you are everywhere.

And Lord, we thank you for what you're going to teach us this morning as we learn how to finish this race of life well, and to go for the gold.

We thank you. I pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, so far, what we've covered in these lessons in Philippians chapter 3 for the last few weeks, we've looked at the first few requirements for finishing the race of this life well.

[5 : 40] They are, as we mentioned just a moment ago, a sanctified dissatisfaction of where we are in our spiritual life. Secondly, a singular devotion to Christ Jesus.

And thirdly, a future-oriented direction, looking forward to that prize of the high calling in Jesus Christ, keeping our eyes fixed on the goal, knowing the direction, and going in that direction, forgetting the past, forgetting what we've done that we might regret, or what we haven't done that we also might regret.

A future-oriented focus. And today, what we're going to cover are the two final things mentioned by the Apostle Paul in this section of chapter number 3 in the book of Philippians.

Now, here is number one. In order for us to be able to finish the race of this life well, the Apostle Paul says that we need to have intense determination.

We need to be determined to run this race. We need to be determined, as he says in these verses here, that we are pressing toward the goal.

[7 : 02] We are determined that we are going to run the race of this life. Let's look at verse 14 again. Paul says, I press toward the goal for the prize, to receive that prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Now, that verb here, I press, by the way, is the same verb translated, I follow after in verse number 12 of chapter number 3.

And what that word does is it carries an idea of intense endeavor. Something that we do that we put all of our energy in.

We put all efforts into this. Now, in our Christian life, are we just floating with the tide or with the current? Or are we doing something for God that is determined?

And we're putting all of our energy and focusing on it. This word, by the way, is a word that the Greeks used to describe a hunter eagerly pursuing his prey.

[8 : 19] And I imagine that you can grasp the picture of that. A hunter that is stealthily moving about the forest or about the prairie and has his eye on the prey.

And whether that's an animal or whether that's a human that is hunting the prey, they're eagerly approaching and stalking their prey with determined, intense determination.

So that's the idea that's carried with this verb. A person doesn't become a winning athlete by watching movies or listening to speeches or reading books or even cheering at the games.

A person becomes a winning athlete by practicing and by getting into the game. They become a winning athlete by getting into the game and determining to win.

They will do what is necessary to be a winner. That same zeal is what motivated the Apostle Paul in his Christian life.

[9 : 31] And we see that in these verses. The same zeal even that he used when he was persecuting Christians. And we see that in verse number 6 of Philippians chapter number 3.

He displayed the same determination in following and serving Christ. Now, come to think of it, what if Christians put that same amount of determination into their Christian life as they put in their hunting or their fishing or their golf or their bowling or whatever it is that they may be engaged in other pursuits?

So that is something to think about. What if we spent as much energy and focus on our Christian life or serving Jesus or following Christ as in other areas of our life?

Before we go further, we have to understand that there are two extremes that we can go to that we need to avoid here.

That pressing forward and that determination for the prize of this goal. And the one is, I must do it all.

[10 : 50] Just like an athlete that has to do their training and be focused, the truth of the matter is, they can't do it alone.

Many will have a coach or they will be engaged in this pursuit with others. So one of the things that we need to avoid is the I must do it all.

And secondly, God must do it all. Both of these extremes are heading for failure. Let go and let God is a clever slogan, but it doesn't fully describe the process of the Christian life.

They make great bumper stickers, but we can't live the Christian life that way. What quarterback would say to his team, okay, man, let's just let go and let the coach do it all.

It doesn't work. It doesn't work that way. Neither does the Christian life work that way. On the other hand, no quarterback would say, listen to me and forget what the coach says.

[12:01] That wouldn't work either. So both extremes are wrong. We can't do it all and God won't do it all. He wants us to be engaged in the race.

The Christian life has been called a fight. It's been called a battle. We have to be engaged in it. We have to be in the struggle, in the fight, so to speak, and being determined to win.

Now, the Christian runner with the spiritual mind realizes that God must work in them if he is going to win the race.

We see that in Philippians chapter 2, verses 12 and 13. And in John 15, verse 5, without me. You can do nothing. God works in us.

Think about this. God works in us that he might be able to work through us. So let's be careful that we don't have the I can do it all mindset in our Christian life, that we don't need God, or go to the opposite extreme and believe the bumper sticker, when we would say, we'll let go and let God.

[13:19] I'm just going to throw my hands up and be fatalistic about this, and God's got it under control, and so I don't have to do a thing. We've got to do some things.

It might be, because God has already forgiven someone else, that we need to literally go to them and mend that relationship and say, I forgive you, or whatever else that might involve.

So we need to be in the race, running the race, and applying ourselves to the things of the spiritual life. God is able to mature us. He is able to strengthen us for the race.

1 Timothy chapter 4, verses 7 and 8, the Bible says, exercise thyself rather unto godliness. In this verse, he was talking about exercise profits a little.

It profits some, but if we exercise ourself to live a godly life, that truly is profitable in our lives.

[14:26] And then also, some Christians are so busy dying to self that they never come back to life again to live the Christian life. So we need to be careful, and what we're careful about is being determined to win the race of this life.

What we need to do is press on with that spiritual determination. Paul said, in verse 14, I press toward the goal.

Paul was determined in his Christian life to be looking forward and reaching forward to that prize, as he puts it, for the upward call of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Now again, as we've said before in other messages in chapter number 3, Paul is not suggesting that we get to heaven by our own efforts.

Paul's not saying, I press on so that I might earn my way into heaven. I am determined, and I am struggling in this Christian race that I might buffet my body, or that I might die to self and just let God do it and earn my way or earn my way to get into heaven.

[15:47] It doesn't work that way. That's not what Paul is saying. He's simply saying that just as the athlete is rewarded for his or her performance, so the faithful believer will be crowned one day when Jesus Christ returns.

1 Corinthians chapter 9. We see that in verses 24 through 27. We will receive a reward at that judgment day if we have worked and been determined in this life and kept that future focus.

But don't worry about missing out. While only one athlete in the games will win the prize, not so in the Christian life.

All believers, all followers of Christ, can receive a reward based upon how we live life on this earth. And another thing, those who run the race, especially in these Greek games, they ran for a laurel wreath that when they appeared before the judge, appeared before the officials, they had a laurel wreath placed on their head that signified them as a winner.

That was their reward. Those crowns faded. Just as rewards today, whether they be trophies or ribbons, those things will fade. They will discolor.

[17:16] They will get worn out. And they will fade. But the crown that Christ gives, those will never, ever fade. The important thing is that we reach the goal that he has established for us.

That we, as Paul said, press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. No matter how successful we may be in the eyes of men, we cannot be rewarded unless we, as he said in verse number 12, take hold of that for which Christ Jesus also took hold of us.

So number one, an intense determination. Number two, discipline. Now for many, that is an ugly word.

Discipline. None of us likes discipline. Now we're not talking about when we do something wrong and we get disciplined for it. I'm talking about just as an athlete who wants to win a race, disciplines themselves.

They discipline themselves in their eating. They won't go out and splurge all the time and eat foods that will not be good towards them keeping a good physical condition.

[18:37] So they discipline their eating habits. They discipline their sleeping habits. They won't go to bed late. They won't binge on Netflix or whatever and stay up till one, two in the morning and have to get up in the morning and train.

No, they're careful. They're disciplined in that. They're disciplined in their training. We as followers of Jesus Christ also need to be disciplined in our lives as well.

Let's look at what Paul says in verses 15 and 16. He says, Therefore, let us as many as are mature. That same word that we saw a few weeks ago where he said I'm not yet perfect.

I haven't yet gotten to the point where I am perfect. But the same word Paul uses here for the word mature. He says, I'm not perfect in the sense that I still sin and I have ways to go in my Christian life to grow.

But he says, I am spiritually mature. He says, Therefore, let us as many as are mature have this mind. We see that again. Same attitude.

[19:52] And if anything in you, and if in anything, I made that mistake again, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

Number 16. Nevertheless, to the degree that we've already attained, no matter where we are in our Christian growth, to the degree that we've already reached, he says, let us walk by the same rule.

The same rule. Let us be of the same mind. It's not enough to run hard and win the race. It's not enough to run hard and win the race in the arena or even in the Christian life.

The runner must obey the rules. In the Greek games, the judges were very strict about this. Any infraction of the rules disqualified the athlete.

He didn't lose his citizenship, although he may have disgraced it. What he did was he lost his privilege to participate and to win a prize.

[21:03] He could no longer participate in that particular game or he could not win that prize. In Philippians 3, verses 15 and 16, what Paul is doing is he's emphasizing the importance of the Christian remembering the spiritual rules laid down in the Word of God.

So when we take God's Word, we see that God has a will and he's let us, he's let that will be known to us through his Word. Those are the rules, if you will, of the Christian life.

So if we want to run this life well, if we want to finish well and receive the prize, we need to obey the rules. We need to follow the rules in order to finish well.

And that's what Paul is saying here. He said, let us walk by the same rule, same rules of order, the same rules of God's will. And he said, let's have the same attitude about it.

So Paul is emphasizing the importance of the Christian remembering the spiritual rules. One of the greatest athletes ever to come out of the United States possibly was Jim Thorpe.

[22:20] At the 1912 Olympic Games at Stockholm, Jim Thorpe won the pentathlon and the decathlon and was undoubtedly the hero of the games.

But the next year, the officials found out that he had played semi-professional baseball and because of that, he had to forfeit, he forfeited his amateur standing, which was a requirement to be in the Olympic Games.

So what this meant was he had to return his gold medals and his trophy and in addition to that, his Olympic achievements were erased from the records.

he imagined that, having gone through all that training, all that discipline, and had proven his athletic prowess and being the hero of the games, had to give it all up because an infraction of the rules, because he broke the rules.

Even though he probably didn't realize that it was a big deal, he broke the rules. Now, by the way, Thorpe's medals were restored in 1985 by the Olympic Committee, but that's beside the point.

[23:37] At that point in time, he had not followed the rules and was disqualified. Now, this is, I believe, what Paul had in mind in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 24 to 27.

He says, any man who enters, in other words, he said, any man who enters an athletic race, he says, he practices some rigid self-control. Philippians 3, 14, if the athlete breaks training, he's disqualified.

If he breaks the rules of the game, he's disqualified and taken out of the game. 2 Timothy 2, 5, he says, the Word of God says pretty much no contestant in the games is crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

And that's what Paul is saying here. Now, the issue is not what the runner thinks or the spectators think, but it's what the judges say.

One day, you and I, as followers of Jesus Christ, if you know Jesus as your Savior, one day, we are going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

[24 : 50] We see that in Romans chapter 14 verses 10 and 12. The Greek word, by the way, for that judgment seat where we will appear is the Greek word bema, or bema, the bema seat of Christ.

By the way, that was the same word that was used in the New Testament for, in the Greek games, that when the runner, when the runners finished the race, or whoever it was in the race, they appeared before the judges, they appeared before the bema, and they were given their reward, they were given their prize for winning.

So, it describes a place where the Olympic judges gave out the prizes, and if we have disciplined ourselves and obey the rules, we will stand before that bema seat of Christ one day and receive our reward.

Now, we have to understand the Bible is filled with people who began the race of their life well, with great success, but failed at the end because they disgraced and disregarded God's rules.

They didn't lose their salvation, but they did lose their rewards. 1 Corinthians 3, verse 15 talks about that. It happened to Lot, Genesis chapter 19.

[26 : 14] It happened to Samson in Judges 16, in Saul, 1 Samuel 28 and 31. Do you remember Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter 5?

And it can happen to us. It's an exciting experience to run the race every day of this Christian life looking unto Jesus. According to Hebrews chapter 12 verses 1 and 2, the author and the finisher of our faith.

And it will be even more exciting when we experience, as Paul said, that upward calling of God in Christ Jesus when he takes us to heaven.

Then we'll stand before that Bema of Christ and receive our rewards. It is a future prospect that motivated the Apostle Paul to run this life well.

That's why he pressed on to receive that prize. He pressed on toward the mark of the calling of that high calling in Christ Jesus. And it can motivate you and it can motivate me today.

[27 : 25] So, let's determine, in closing, let's determine that we will keep pressing on. This week, no matter what you go through, no matter what circumstances in life, let's press on and let's be disciplined to do it according to God's will.

Let's have a great week and may God bless. Let's close in prayer. Our Father, thank you. Thank you for your word.

Thank you for this encouraging and motivating word from the Apostle Paul. and Father, may we follow his example by pressing on, by having an intense determination to run this Christian life well and may we be disciplined in our Christian life as well.

Father, please be with each one listening to this message today. Father, I ask that you would bless each family. We ask that you would bless our faith family and everyone all over who are hearing these words today.

We thank you, we praise you, for it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.