

**Message #19****Philippians 3:12-14**

A few weeks ago there was some talk in the educational world of making high school students state their goals in life so they could be directed to the proper education that would fit those goals. Now one question I have is how many high school students actually know what they are going to do? Maybe girls have a better perspective than the boys, but frankly not too many actually end up where they think they are going to end up in their high school years.

But let's suppose that this is what happens. Let's suppose that in your senior year of high school some school counselor sits you down and asks you where you're headed and what your goals are. In fact, let's open this question up not only to high school seniors, but to all people of all ages.

If that question were to be asked of everyone, I really doubt that the vast majority of people would say, "My goal in life is to pursue Christlikeness." In fact, I don't ever remember hearing anything like that when it comes to New Year's Resolutions.

I have not heard people say my goal for this New Year is to be so devoted to Jesus Christ that God will eventually give me a prize for it. The only person that I know of who actually said that and meant it was the Apostle Paul.

It is very clear that Paul's goal in life was Christlikeness. It was not some resolution he made once a year; this was the pursuit of his entire existence. His one goal in life was to understand the Word of God and so dedicate himself to Jesus Christ that he would accomplish everything in life that God wanted him to accomplish so that he could win the prize of God. The fact that God called him and saved him and gifted him was that which drove him to pursue this objective.

That was the goal Paul had for his life and that is the goal he wanted for the people of the church of Philippi and that is the goal God wants for us. What we see here is this:

**THE BELIEVER WHO WILL REFLECT THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD AND WIN THE PRIZE OF GOD IS ONE THAT WILL CONTINUALLY PURSUE A CHRISTLIKENESS THAT PASSES ON THROUGH EVERYTHING.**

Paul's goal in life was Christlikeness. Every day for Paul was a day to pursue his high calling in Jesus Christ. Every day was a day for Paul to pursue the eternal prize of God. He wanted to win when he got before God and he wanted that same thing for the Philippians.

Now in these verses we get a very personal look at how a prize winning believer operates. If any believer desires to win the prizes of God someday, all he needs to do is take a good look at this text and apply it to his or her life.

There are three prize winning qualities that show up in this passage for one who will reach the goal of winning a prize for Christlikeness:

**PRIZE WINNING QUALITY #1 – The prize winning quality of honest personal evaluation.  
3:12a**

If one is to finish winning the prize, one must honestly evaluate himself. **The first quality is realism. The believer who will win the prize of God is one who will honestly and realistically evaluate his own spiritual condition and admit he has not arrived at complete Christlikeness or complete spiritual maturity.**

The Apostle Paul clearly admits that he has not already attained to his objective. That verb “obtained” is an aorist verb. What that means is Paul is saying there has not been any point of time when I have obtained my Christ-like objective perfectly.

In fact, the word “obtain” means to lay hold of total Christlikeness (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 263). Paul’s desire was to know Jesus Christ and the will of God so intimately that he would win the prize and to this point, he did not think he had arrived at that level.

He also did not believe he was “perfect.” That word “perfect” refers to having reached a perfect, completed condition that has accomplished and fulfilled everything perfectly (*Ibid.*, p. 442).

**Now the word “perfect” is never used in the Bible to describe sinless perfection.** All have sinned and no one is sinlessly perfect, except Jesus Christ. The word “perfect” is used three ways in the Bible:

- 1) It is used to describe positional perfection that one has in Jesus Christ.
- 2) It is used to describe relative perfection, meaning level of spiritual maturity.
- 3) It is used to describe ultimate perfection, when we are with God and no longer can sin.

The word “perfect” in **verse 12** refers to being at a complete mature and growth level that is a completely finished product. Paul is saying I do not evaluate myself as having arrived yet to the complete level of maturity that has accomplished everything.

It would be well for us to remember that at this point Paul had been a believer for 30 years and he thought his life might be over. Yet he still did not believe he had arrived at the ultimate level of Christlikeness.

Keep in mind that this was his pursuit. So we could conclude from this that the reason for him not achieving this complete mature status was not due to lack of effort, or lack of intense drive or desire.

Some people will say, “Well no one is perfect” and “I haven’t arrived yet,” which is true. But often when it is said, it is used by someone as an excuse for apathy or sin. This was not the case with Paul. Paul passionately pursued the will of God for his life. His desire was to be like Jesus Christ. In fact, he was willing to die for Jesus Christ, yet even with that, he knew he had not arrived to a total Christ-like perfection. He had not grown to a level of complete maturity.

Prize winning believers are like that. Prize winning believers are honest about themselves. They always see there is more work to do and they always see the need for more growth.

Prize winning believers realize there is room for more prayer, more grace, more Biblical knowledge and more service. This is the way prize winners think.

Sometimes you bump into believers who use their past heritage or service for making a claim to their spirituality. Prize winners don't do that. Prize winners are always working on things because they realize they have not arrived. That was Paul.

**PRIZE WINNING QUALITY #2 – The prize winning quality of a proper Christ-like pursuit.  
3:12b**

Although Paul had not come to a complete Christlikeness, that was his pursuit.

The verb “press on” (διωκω) in **verse 12** and again in **verse 14** is a verb that means to pursue something, to drive after something, to follow something with speed (*Ibid.*, p. 119). In fact, this word was used to describe the intense action of runners in the Greek games.

Paul says I am pursuing with rapid speed the goal of “laying hold” of Christ Jesus. That idea of “laying hold” is the idea of seizing something or to overtake by comprehending and apprehending something. It is a word that describes discovering and grasping something at a high level of apprehension (*Ibid.*, p. 235).

We are speaking here of an intense mental pursuit. What Paul is saying here is that I do not consider myself to be at the ultimate level of Christlikeness but I am after it. Jesus Christ pursued me and tracked me down and now I am pursuing Christlikeness.

**PRIZE WINNING QUALITY #3 – The prize winning quality of proper mental attitudes.  
3:13-14**

There is no doubt that a key to Paul's amazing spiritual life was the way he thought. He thought in right ways about himself, his goals and where he was at.

He did not consider himself as having arrived, but he pursued his goal of Christlikeness and he intensely went after that goal.

The word “goal” (**v. 14**) refers to his target or goal and the word “prize” refers to the award one receives for reaching the goal. Paul was a goal-oriented person. **But all of his goals were focused on the eternal, not the temporal.**

Paul was zeroed in on Christ-like development. He had true spiritual maturity in the crosshairs of his mind. To help him get to the goal, he maintained two important attitudes:

**Proper Mental Attitude #1** - The attitude of forgetting the past. **3:13b**

The person who will win the prizes of God is one who learns how to forget the things behind. That word “forget” means to forget by neglect. A critical key to forgetting something in our minds is to neglect to focus on it and not allow our mind to dwell on it.

Bishop Moule, who wrote a commentary on Philippians, said we must remember this in the context of a “foot runner” who wants to win a race. The context is a racing context. In order to win an award at any footrace, at any distance, you must totally forget about your previous accomplishments or missteps. You must forget your dusty trophies and fading memories. You must totally focus on the task at hand, which is to run the race in order to win it.

**When Paul says he forgets the things behind, he means he does not live in the past.** We never find Paul looking back on past successes or failures. We do not find Paul looking back on previous accomplishments or relying on fading laurels. Paul’s view is I am here running now. After 30 years of very successful ministry, most would call it quits and retire. Not Paul, he was still running to win.

F. B. Meyer, the British minister of the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, said we must learn to forget two things if we are going to press on to win God’s prize.

**(Champion Forgetfulness #1)** - We must learn to forget our past accomplishments.

There are some people who live in the past and that is where they always live. Their idea is I did this once or I used to do that or I one time accomplished that. God used me back then. We must forget the past if we are to win the prize.

**(Champion Forgetfulness #2)** - We must learn to forget our past sins.

The person who dwells on past failures and sins will never win the prize.

As Meyer said there are things in each of our pasts for which we are ashamed, but if we have confessed them and handed them over to God, forget them and move on. There is no sense dwelling on past failures.

We will not finish a prize winner if we live in the past.

A good illustration of this is any student who takes any exam. You cannot rely on what you did last semester. You cannot rely on your successes or failures. If you want to earn the prize of a high grade for a course, you must focus here and now. So it is with the prize of God. Prize winners cannot live in the past.

**Proper Mental Attitude #2** - The attitude of reaching to the future. **3:13c-14**

Now both participles forgetting and reaching are present tense middle voice participles. What this means is that each person is responsible, in and of himself (middle voice), for this continual action (present tense).

The word “reaching forward” means to stretch forward to get to that finish line. Paul was focused on getting to that finish line with a Christlikeness that would win the prize. He was after it.

He did not live in the past. He did not think about the past. He was reaching to the future and focused on winning the prize. His goal was to be like Jesus Christ.

As the song says, “To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus, all I ask, to be like Him. All through life’s journey from earth to glory, all I asked to be like Him.”

I used to run races competitively. I learned that to win, I needed to stay focused on myself. I must keep working on me in my race. I would not win if I was thinking about the other guy. I was totally focused on my pace, my speed, my race.

If we want to win the prize of God, that is what we need to do. We need to focus on our own lives.