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# Sermon Notes

December 27, 2020

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

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## Pressing On For the Prize Philippians 3:7-15

### Wide World of Sports

- ❖ Paul often uses pictures from the world of athletics and/or sports metaphors to illustrate spiritual truth
  - one of Paul's frequent athletic analogies is that of a runner running a race
  - the runner pictures a Christian, and the race is the Christian life
- ❖ In Philippians 3, Paul provides a deeply autobiographical lesson that relies on an illustration from the world of running
- ❖ No matter what circumstances or obstacles you face, God intends for you to keep pressing forward in the Christian life like a runner who is intent on winning

### Paul's Personal Testimony

- ❖ Verses 4-7 describe what Paul's life was like before he met Christ
  - Paul lived as a God-fearing, law-abiding Jew
  - Paul trusted in his own achievements and accomplishments

- ❖ When God intersects Paul's life on the Damascus Road, Paul's values are instantly turned upside down
  - everything Paul formerly labeled as gain is actually loss
  - all Paul previously rejected and sought to stamp out is really gain
- ❖ No matter how much Paul gains in Christ (knowledge, righteousness, power, fellowship, glory of Christ), there is still more to pursue
  - even though Paul is united to Christ and has the mind of Christ, Paul is not perfect
  - Paul is still subject to temptation and must struggle with his unredeemed flesh
  - Paul is still a sinner

### Perfection

- ❖ Perfection is the goal of every true believer, but NO ONE reaches that goal in this life
  - like Paul, you must press on, pursue the goal and run the race (*cf.* 2 Peter 3:18)
  - Augustine: "What you are must always displease you, if you would attain that which you are not."
  - Matthew Henry: "Wherever there is true grace there is a desire for more grace."
- ❖ Perfection in this life is a goal, not an achievement

- ❖ Why is growth necessary?
  - “since I know I will obtain heaven, why do I need to trouble myself with all the difficulties and challenges of ‘running the race’?”
  - there are **multiple** reasons why you should press on for the prize and pursue growth
    - growth is natural: those who are truly born into the family of God have a hunger to grow
    - growth glorifies God
    - growth provides a witness: growing puts the fact that you are being changed by God’s grace on display
    - growth contributes to your assurance of salvation
- ❖ Go hard after God!
  - run with the intention, zeal, and singled-minded devotion of one who is intent on winning
  - “work out” what God “works in”
  - there is no “let go and let God” in the Christian life
- ❖ Paul knows he needs more of Christ and that Christ needs and wants more of him
  - do you know this to be true of yourself?
  - pursuing Christ requires focused concentration (Paul says he does “one thing”)
  - a continuous action

- ❖ Pressing on for “one thing” has a negative and a positive dimension to it
  - negative: forgetting what lies behind
  - positive: straining for what lies ahead
- ❖ Let go of the past! (a new year is a good time to do that)
  - nothing that happened in the past is relevant for your future
  - perfectionists are always looking to the past
  - the past will paralyze you
- ❖ Strain forward to what lies ahead
  - extreme effort is in view here
  - more growth, more sanctification, becoming more like Jesus

<b>Personal Application</b>
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1. Identify those places where you are “stuck in the past”. Spend time considering the way those blocks are holding you back from straining forward to what lies ahead. What do you need to do in order to convince yourself to follow Paul’s example of forgetting what lies behind?
2. As you prepare for the New Year ahead, what areas of growth do you sense the Lord calling your attention toward? What will you need to do if you intend to pursue these with single-minded focus and zeal?