

The year was 1923... and the competing track teams of Scotland and France were neck and neck. ... Among the events remaining... was the 440... a sprint of just one lap around the track. ... As the runners... clad in traditional 1920s white... came to the first turn... they were bunched tight... shoulder to shoulder... when one of them was pushed to the ground - and off the track. ... For a second he was down — and then up again... running... (even though he was now twenty meters behind the pack of runners). He kept his knees high... his head back — flying. ... And as the leaders sprinted to the finish line... he emerged ahead to win! ... ..It was a famous win... by Eric Liddell... immortalized in the movie *Chariots of Fire*.

What would most runners have done? ... Most would have waved a fist... dusted themselves off... cursed a bit... and watched the outcome. ... Perhaps there would have been a few words exchanged after the race. ... But Eric Liddell was beyond the ordinary. ... It was as if he had been reading our passage of study today in Philippians — forgetting what is behind and straining forward to what lies ahead... I focus all my energy on the race... and seeing the goal... I fly to the finish.

This is the way everyone who is in the grip of Christ's grace... must live. ... But let's be honest. ... Not many of us are!

We seem to have settled for life... at a far more inglorious level... than what God wants... and makes available to us. ... We seem to accept the lie that sin has far more authority over circumstances that surround us...than it actually does. ... We have fallen... so we just get up and merely watch the finishers. ... .. We come to the Word of God in our study times... with low expectations... and we come into worship with little imagination.

Tragically – we lose sight of... forget... or ignore the fact... that Jesus declared that we have the power and authority to do even **greater** things than **He** did.

**John 14:12-14 (ESV)**

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.*

What these verses are proclaiming is:

- We can confront the powers of darkness knowing they have been disarmed. Jesus has armed us with sufficient strength to overcome the perpetual enemies of the soul. We can pray prayers that lay hold of and release God’s willingness and ability to act in accordance with God’s will. We can ask for something of God’s kingdom, God’s rule in the future to enter into our present.
- We can enter into a new depth of intimacy with God—far beyond the OT priest who entered the Holy of Holies. We are in union with Christ, with a connection like a branch has with a vine.
- We can make a significant impact in the world. Life is not only imparted to our souls when we read Scripture. A Word-saturated, prayer driven life can resist and push back the secularizing forces of culture and society.

We have to run the race before us... as though we expect to **win** it. ... Of course anyone who has been saved... wants to be "winning Christians"... and fulfill ALL the purposes... for which we have been saved.

So... this morning... we will be looking at 5 essentials for winning the race and one day receiving the reward that is promised ... What are these essentials for staying in the race and running to win...? ... Let me mention

them to you now... and then we will see how they are brought forth by our passage this morning in Philippians chapter 3. (As I said...) There are five of them... They are: 1) Dissatisfaction... You probably heard me right. I did say **DIS**-satisfaction... 2) Devotion... 3) Direction... 4) Determination ... and 5) Discipline.

Now... lets read our passage for today... five verses... and then we will take these one at a time from what we read.

### **Phil 3:12-16**

In the verses just prior... Paul gave his impressive credentials... a Hebrew of Hebrews... a high ranking Pharisee... zealous... so zealous... in fact... that he was a persecutor of Christians... But he did not want anyone to think that his elite status among the Jews... allowed him to **rest** on his laurels. ... Instead... he had a sanctified **DIS**-satisfaction... which motivated him to keep going.

### **Phil 3:12-13a**

In verse 12... when Paul uses the word “perfect” ... “*Not that I am already perfect...*” ... He used the Greek word *τελειος* ... which means “mature”... in the sense of having completed all there is. Paul says that he has not actually fulfilled all the purposes that Christ has for him.

Now... if the Apostle **Paul** had not arrived... then this passage tells us that **we** haven't arrived... Yet sometimes we think an act as if we've come to some kind of spiritual living room... where we can kick back and relax. ... We've settled into a couch... from which our spiritual lives can almost be

run **automatically**. ... We program our spiritual lives like we program our DVRs... automating our attempt to make sure we won't miss anything... and we do this... with just about as much passion. ... We simply push a few buttons to keep things going... and then... kick back and chill...

But... let's be clear... A mark of someone who is a follower of Jesus is that he/she is **not** satisfied. ... The evidence that you have Christ... is that you want **more** of Him. ... If you **don't** want more of Him... something is horrifically wrong! ... I strongly urge you... to meet with God and talk this over with Him.

Christ takes hold of us... that we might **pursue** Him. ... So... we can **expect** to always sense a sort of holy dissatisfaction with life... that causes us to want something more. ... Now even the non-believer has a restless desire for something more in life. It rages sometimes... and at other times it is there... but not as strong. ... But for the believer... Christ has seized our hearts... and wants to use this common desire for something more... that we might seek this - "something more" – and FIND it... in Him.

A sanctified dissatisfaction... is the first essential to progress in the Christian race. Every true Believer simply must... recognize **that** holy dissatisfaction is present within them... and pursue the dissatisfaction – the yearning for "something more" – in Christ. ... Because once a Christian loses their awareness of this yearning... becomes satisfied... or starts to think that he/she has arrived... that believer ceases to grow. ... The reality is... though... that the more we come to know Christ... the more we will come to sense our need to grow

Pursuing the prize of spiritual maturity begins with dissatisfaction over your present spiritual condition. ... In some sense... do you feel dissatisfied? Does it feel as if something has seized your heart and won't let you go? Christ Jesus is calling you to run for the prize of knowing Him more fully.

Paul still had the yearning for "something more" ... even though he had **many** converts... established churches... reached large cities with the Gospel... and brought the Gospel to multiple continents. He made incredible advances for the Kingdom of God... but he saw that there was still much ground to be covered.

Here are the confessions of a **truly** godly man. They express the realization that he had not reached the **highest** mark of his calling. ... He was never fully satisfied with his accomplishments. ... No matter how much you and I grow in knowledge and holiness... there will always be room for further growth and development.

Paul said that his goal was to know Christ... to be like Christ... and to be all Christ had in mind for him. ... This goal took all of Paul's energies. ... This is a helpful example for us. ... We should not let anything take our eyes off our goal — knowing Christ... better and better... and then better. ...With the single-mindedness of an athlete in training... we must lay aside everything harmful and forsake anything that may distract us from being effective Christians. What is holding you back?

Every Christian is grasped by the Lord Jesus Christ for some purpose... therefore every man and woman should press onward... his entire life... that he/she might lay hold of that purpose for which Jesus Christ grasped

him. ... God lays hold of all believers for two key purposes: holiness and usefulness.

Brothers and sisters... if you have been seized by Christ... and are in the grip of his grace... you must **press on** in your own hot... grasping pursuit... of an ever-deeper knowledge of Him... and usefulness to Him ... The gospel allows no room for a bland... tepid... mediocre Christian life... that strives to be **neither** hot nor cold. ... We are all called (every believer within the sound of my voice)... to a single-minded... determined... hot pursuit of Christ.

If you have been grasped by grace... God is speaking to you right now. Do you hear him? ... Pursue! ... Seize! ... Take hold of Christ... read His Word... linger in fellowship with Him in prayer... every morning... every day! Seek a conscious presence of Him all through the day! Work through that holy dissatisfaction... that is already in you.

The first essential for staying in the race and running to win... is to use the dissatisfaction deep inside of you... to take hold of Christ and His purposes for you. ... The next essential is **Devotion**.

### **Phil 3:13b**

*"But one thing I do..."* ... The believer must devote himself to "running the Christian race." ... No athlete succeeds by doing everything... he/she succeeds by *specializing*. ... There are those few athletes who seem proficient in many sports... but they are the exception. ...The winners are

those who concentrate... who keep their eyes on the goal and let nothing distract them. ...They are devoted entirely to their calling... achieving what God wants them to do.

To achieve what God wants us to do... there are some things we must forget. ... Paul mentions "*forgetting those things which are behind.*" This phrase is in the present tense... indicating that Paul keeps on forgetting. This word "*forgetting*" does not mean obliterating the memories of the past... but a conscious **refusal** to let the things of the past **consume** his attention... and hinder his spiritual growth. ... No person can erase from his memory what has transpired before... but he can keep the past from controlling the present and the future. ... By the way... when God forgives our sins... He still remembers what they were... but He does not hold them against us. ... A believer thus must not permit the past to cause him depression or overconfidence in the present.

Paul had reason to forget his past — he had held the coats of those who had stoned Stephen... the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:57- 58). We have all done things for which we are ashamed... and we live in the tension of what we have been and what we want to be. ... Because our hope is in Christ... however... we can let go of past guilt and look forward to what God will help us become. ... Don't dwell on your past. ... Instead... grow in the knowledge of God by concentrating on your relationship with him now. Realize that you are forgiven... and then move on to a life of faith and obedience.

Of course this also applies to our forgetting our past **achievements**... as well as our failures. ... There is instruction for everyone here across the spectrum of age and experience. ... For those who have some miles on them as they journey with Christ... and perhaps have been battle-worn on occasion... along with some striking accomplishments... God calls you to selective amnesia... so that you will not be lulled from your stride. ... For all... young and old... we must not look back. ... Lift up your eyes. ... Look straight ahead. ... Focus!

And of course... we all have our disappointments... when we have been mistreated or disrespected in some way... abused in some cases. Perhaps it was a fellow believer... or a family member... or a friend at work. ... I am going to repeat the same thing... Quit looking back! Lift up your eyes... Look straight ahead... Focus!

The first essential for staying in the race and running to win... is to use the dissatisfaction deep inside of you... ... The second essential is **Devotion**. And the third essential is **Direction**.

### **Phil 3:13c**

In our Western Culture... we are accustomed to saying "past, present, future." ... We start from the perspective of the past. We try and understand reality through this orientation of examining the past. ... But... can I tell you something...? ... Believers ought to should view time... as flowing from the *future*... into our *present*... and then into our *past*. Believers should be future-oriented... what determines our present is NOT



as much of our past... as the future God has for us... and what God is making us into - "forgetting those things which are behind... and straining forward to what lies in the future..."

A good example of this principle... is Joseph (seen in Gen. 45:1-15). You may recall that when he met his brothers the second time... and revealed who he was... their brother... who they sold into slavery in Egypt... he held no grudge against them. ...To be sure... they had mistreated him... but he saw the past from God's point of view. ... As a result he was unable to hold anything against his brothers. ... Joseph knew that God had a plan for his life — a race for him to run — and in fulfilling that plan and looking ahead... he broke the power of the past.

Too many Christians are shackled by regrets of the past. ...They are trying to run the race by looking backward! ... No wonder they stumble and fall... and get in the way of other Christians! ... Some Christian runners are being distracted by the *successes* of their past... not the failures... and this is just as bad. ... "The things which are behind"... must be set aside and "the things which are before"... must take their place.

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It is possible to have dissatisfaction, devotion, and direction, and still lose the race and the reward. There is a fourth essential... **Determination** !

**Phil 3:14**

"*I press on!*" This same verb is translated "*I follow after*" in Philippians 3:12... and it carries the idea of intense endeavor. ...The Greeks used it to describe a hunter... eagerly pursuing his prey. ... A man does not become a winning athlete by simply listening to lectures... watching how-to videos ... reading instruction manuals... or cheering others who are in the games. He becomes a winning athlete... by getting into the game and determining to win!

But... there are two extremes to avoid here: (1) "*I must do it all*" and (2) "*God must do it all!*" ... The first describes the activist... the second the quietist... and both are heading for failure. ... "*Let go and let God!*" is a clever slogan... but it does not fully describe the process of Christian living. Some Christians are so busy "dying to self" that they never come back to life again... to run the race! ... And others (the activists) are so sure they can make it on their own... that they never stop to read the Word... pray... or ask for the power of the Lord.

The fifth essential to stay in the race... running to win... is **Discipline** !

### **Phil 3:15-16**

It is not enough to run hard and win the race... the runner must also obey the rules. ... In the Greek games... the judges were very strict about this. Any infringement of the rules... disqualified the athlete. ... He did not lose his citizenship... (though he disgraced it)... but he did lose his privilege to participate and win a prize.

Christian maturity involves acting on the guidance that we have already received. ... The believers were in different stages... but everyone needed to obey the truth they had learned already. ... As they pressed on toward the goal... they should not use their lack of complete knowledge as an excuse for taking lightly... what they knew or for getting sidetracked.

Mature people don't think they are perfect or have arrived. ... Those who are mature... refuse themselves even a satisfied glance back at spiritual attainments. ... Instead... forgetting what is behind... they pour their energies into the pursuit of the full knowledge of Christ. ... They run the race rather than imagine it is over. ... Paul's confident assertion that if any of them thought otherwise... God would reveal it to them was not a smug assertion... that if necessary... they would learn "the hard way." ... Rather... he meant that if his brothers and sisters in Philippi had some flaws in their Christian understanding... God himself would graciously correct it. ... Paul trusted the Spirit of God to bring his people to the knowledge of the truth.

I would hope that no one considers Paul to be a little extreme. ... There should not be anyone who thinks that after years of Christian living... they will somehow arrive. ... If you think a time is coming on earth... when your knowledge of Christ will be full and satisfying... if you think that a time will come when you can ease up — you're wrong! ... We are to stay on the track... keep in the race... and fly in our pursuit of Christ.

Eric Liddell, "the Flying Scotsman," was already famous when he made his phenomenal comeback to win the 440 in the Scotland-France meet. ... And

his fame increased as a runner and a Christian... especially at the Paris Olympics in 1924... where he refused to run in his best events (the 100 meters and the 4 x 100 relay)... because they were run on Sunday.

*Chariots of Fire* inaccurately portrays this as a last-minute decision in Paris. He actually decided well in advance... and began to train for the 200 and 400 meter races. ... Liddell took a bronze in the 200... and then amazed the world by winning the 400... in the world-record time of 47.6 seconds... five meters ahead of the silver medalist — he was truly flying!

Runner he was... but that was only one manifestation of his devotion to Christ. ... In 1925... having completed his degree in science... at Edinburgh... and a degree in divinity... he set sail as a missionary to China with the China Inland Mission. ... In 1932... during his first furlough... he married Florence Mackenzie. ... In 1941... facing the growing threat of Japanese occupation... he sent his wife and three daughters to Canada... to stay with her family... while he stayed on to serve among the poor. Liddell suffered many hardships... but kept on running hard after Christ. And then in 1943... he was interned in the Weihsien Internment Camp... where he again cheerfully served those around him. ... In 1945... at the age of forty-three... Eric Liddell died of a brain tumor... that may have been caused by his malnourishment and overwork. ... Liddell's grave was marked by a simple wooden cross... with his name written in boot polish... there in China.

How is your running...? Have you stayed in the race...? Are you running to win...?