

LIVING WITH THE GOAL IN MIND

The history of the world has known all kinds of people, some good, some bad. Most of those people live relatively unimpressive lives. They are born. They live, and they die. But the influence they have had on their world has been relatively very small. Aside from loving family members and friends, they are soon forgotten. On the other hand, there have been those people who have rocked the world by their influence. Their names are in the history books, and every succeeding generation still studies their lives. There are artists like Michelangelo, musicians like Beethoven, tyrants like Adolph Hitler, godly men like Moses, and the list could go on. What separates those who are soon forgotten from those who in some way change the world? Among other things, those who greatly impact their world are people who have some great driving passion. They live for something they deeply believe in, something that they believe to be greater than their own lives. The Apostle Paul was such a person. He changed the world of his time, and he is still changing the world through the New Testament books he wrote. As we study the book of Philippians, we get an inside look at what made him tick. We see the desires, goals and thoughts that made him the man he was.

THE GOAL

1. I WANT TO KNOW CHRIST

Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,"

At first glance, this seems like a ridiculous statement. Obviously, Paul already knew Christ. We are aware of that great story where he met Christ on the Damascus road and went from being Saul of Tarsus (the great persecutor of the church) to Paul the apostle. Paul was not saying, "I want to be introduced to Jesus Christ." He was saying, "I want to know him better." Just as there are different levels of intimacy with a friend or a family member, so there are different levels of knowing God. Unfortunately, most of us know God on a superficial level. He lives within our hearts, and we have experienced his mercy and forgiveness. But there's more. The Scripture tells us that we have the privilege of knowing God better.

Ephesians 1:16-17, "I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."

Always remember that God is a person. He thinks. He makes decisions, and he has emotions just like we do. And as a person he wants to be known, and he can be known in a deeper way than any of us can imagine. We catch a glimpse of what it is to know God deeply in the lives of some of his great servants. Abraham was called the "friend of God." Moses spent 40 days in God's presence, and David was called a man after God's

own heart. When it comes to knowing God, we are often wading in the shallow water, but there is a huge ocean before us that we've never ventured out into.

George Barna described the spiritual life of Americans as "a mile wide and an inch deep."

Eliza Edmunds Hewitt was an invalid for an extended period of her life. Out of this experience she developed an intimate relationship with the Lord, and she shared her feelings in poems, many of which were set to music. Her hymn "More About Jesus says:"

More About Jesus would I know,
More of His grace to others show,
More of His saving fullness see,
More of His love Who died for me.

That was the driving force of Paul's life. He wanted more of Jesus.

2. I WANT TO KNOW THE POWER OF CHRIST IN MY LIFE

It may appear that living the Christian life is simply a matter of deciding to do so and then disciplining yourself. For example, if I decide to play baseball, I may dedicate myself to practicing every afternoon so that I may become good at it. If someone wants to become a musician or an artist, he put his best efforts into learning how to do that. Living the Christian life is not something that you become good at because you have practiced. The Christian life is something that requires God's life living within you and through you. It requires supernatural power.

When Jesus Christ walked on the earth, He was full of power. He was able to say to the blind, "Receive your sight," and the blind was able to see. He was able to say to the lame, "get up and walk." He raised the dead and even had authority over nature. He could say to a raging storm, "peace, be still, and the storm miraculously became as calm as glass. It was because of his great healing power that thousands of people flocked around him. It is that same power of the Holy Spirit that is required if we are going to live godly lives.

Ephesians 1:18-21, "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

Paul says, "There are two things I want you to know. First, I want you to know about the glorious inheritance you have waiting for you in heaven." If we knew more about the next life, we would be more dedicated to God in this life. Paul said, "I also want you to know about the power that is available to you to live the Christian life in this world," and

their two things that he says about the power available to us. First, he says it is an incomparable power. In other words, there's nothing on earth that can compare to it. We've all seen some very powerful things. Hurricanes, tornadoes even atomic bombs – all of those things have great power, but they cannot compare to the power God has available for us. He says the power we have available is the same kind of power that raised Jesus from the dead. All the things that may happen in this world may be very powerful, but none can give life to the dead. If we are to live the Christian life successfully, we need resurrection power. We need power that will take us from spiritual deadness and give us a life that is on fire for Jesus Christ. Nothing else will do.

In 1994, Heidi and Rolland Baker arrived in Mozambique amidst the hard times following the Mozambique Civil War. Even the Red Cross trucks were not safe and were bombed. During the hard times, sometimes even threatened by death, Heidi and Rolland experienced amazing miracles of healing for the blind, crippled and those affected by AIDS.

MOVIE CLIP Mama Heidi - Your God is God (2:27)

http://www.wingclips.com/cart.php?target=product&product_id=16183&substring=power

The problem that we have is that we're trying to live by God's standards without God's power. That is like trying to play in a major league baseball game using a twig off of a tree for a bat. It doesn't matter how hard or fast you swing that twig at the ball, you are going to strike out every time. How do we go about receiving the power of God in our lives?

THE PLAN

For someone to have a goal, something he would really like to accomplish is not an unusual thing. Knowing how to reach that goal is not as common. Many people don't have any idea how to get to where they would like to be. Your life can't go according to plan if you have no plan.

1. THE PLAN IS PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION

Philippians 3:12-13, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it."

Sometimes when you look at the lack of progress that you made in becoming what you want to be, it can become very discouraging. Paul makes it very clear that he is not a perfect man. He wanted to be, but he was not. If you ever run across someone who does think that he is perfect, just check with his spouse, and you'll get the real story. The truth is that we're all imperfect people who live in an imperfect world. The question is not, "am I without sin." The question is, "am I'm more like Jesus today that I was one month ago."

2. THE PAST IS OVER... FORGET IT

Philippians 3: 13, "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead."

The original word Paul used when he wrote, "forgetting what is behind," was a term that meant fully forgetting, completely forgetting. It was an ancient athletic term used of a runner who outran the other runners in a race. Once he got into the lead, he would never turn and look back. He would forget about the other runner. The one in the lead focuses on the tape before him rather than the runners behind him. That's what we have to do with our past. We must leave it behind us and not look back. The truth is living in the past will never move you forward in your Christian life. You have to put the past behind in order to move forward.

Winston Churchill, on one of his visits to the U.S. remarked in the course of a conversation, "If the present is quarreling with your past, there can be no future."

a) WE MUST FORGET THE BAD THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED

Many people never really have any success in running the Christian race because they are weighed down by memories that continue to haunt them. They remember how underprivileged they were growing up and how they felt inferior because of it. They remember the sins of their youth, and they can never get over the guilt they feel for doing the things they did. Paul had to live with the fact that he persecuted Christians before becoming a follower of Christ himself. But he learned that God forgives sin, not just small sins but huge sins. That truth is one of the reasons the song "Amazing grace," although written many years ago still remains a tremendous blessing to Christians all over the world today. God's grace is amazing because he takes the sins of our past and remembers them know more. He casts them into the deepest ocean and then puts up a sign that says "no fishing." Your ability to know God more deeply will never be limited by your past sins unless you allow it to be. We must leave those past sins where they belong, at the foot of the cross.

b) WE MUST FORGET THE GOOD THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED

It is not only our remembrance of the bad things we have done that slows us down. We can also be slowed down by remembering the good things we have done because we have a tendency to rest upon those things. Sometimes when I come home from church on Sunday, I come with a heart that is full of praise for what God has done. While it is good to rejoice over the good things God is done and praise him for those things, I have to be careful to remind myself that what has happened on that particular day is now history. I cannot sit back throughout the week living off of what has been done because what has been done is gone. The new week that I face presents a new race to me, and I must run it with all of my might, relying completely upon God to give victory in the race of this new week.

3. THE FIGHT IS SERIOUS... EMBRACE IT

Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,"

We live in a time when many people will do almost anything to avoid pain, but not all pain is bad. Sometimes pain is the only way that we can learn certain things. And there is a sense in which you'll never know someone to the full potential of intimacy with them until you share some of their deepest painful experiences. A veteran of WW 2 proudly proclaimed that he was a member of the survivors club of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. There are not many of them left, but he was one of them. And as he spoke you could tell that he & his brothers had a unique fellowship because of what they all experienced together. People who have come through divorce can help other people who are going through divorce because they have felt the same hurts. They know what it is like. People who have lost little children can help other people who are coming through that same experience in life because they have been there. Common suffering can bond people together and create intimacy.

How can you share in the sufferings of Christ? Jesus Christ was often moved in with sadness at the unbelief and hardness of the hearts of people. When you pray fervently for someone who is living a destructive life and you feel burdened over what they're doing to themselves, you are sharing in God's suffering. When you share the gospel with someone and they reject it and reject you, you are sharing with the sufferings of Christ. Are we willing to be persecuted for our faith? Are we willing to be the oddball at the office because we believe in Jesus and live for him? Are we willing to be thought odd by our extended families because of the activities that we will not allow our children to be involved in. Sometimes, I am afraid that we're more concerned about having people like us than we are about being faithful to God. I remember shortly after becoming a Christian going to a family Christmas party and feeling like I was being shunned by some of my family members because of my newfound faith. That was not a fun thing, but it is things like that that allow us to draw near to Christ because we are going through something that he went through.

4. THE CALLING IS REAL... PURSUE IT

Living without a purpose in life is probably the most deadening thing that anyone can endure. I have often seen older people begin drying up when can't any longer do what they have given their lives to do. They become depressed because they feel as though they no longer have a purpose.

Paul said in Philippians 3: 12, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

Philippians 3:14, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Paul realized that when God called him to faith in Jesus Christ that he had something in mind. And what he had in mind was not to sit on the spiritual bench. It was to be actively playing in the game, and that is what Paul wanted.

I thought about this last week, and I remembered those first days of my salvation experience. I asked myself the question, "what did God have in mind for me to do when he saved me?" As I thought, I could remember the seeds God planted in my heart which have since that time grown into much more maturity. I also thought about what God probably had in mind for me that I have missed because of my disobedience or lack of faith. And I wondered what my life would have looked like at this point if I had been more faithful to him. Whatever the case, we can say with Paul, "I know that Christ Jesus has taken hold of me for a purpose." We're not here for no reason. We're here on a special mission that only you and I can perform for God.

Paul said, "I press toward the goal." The goal that he spoke of was the finish line. Paul dreamed of the day when he hit the tape and crossed the finish line.

In the 1908 Olympics, there was an Italian runner by the name of Dorando Pietri. When he entered the stadium for the final 100 yards of the marathon he was running, he was in a state of collapse. The Italian runner fell five times before an official finally helped him across the finish line. He was disqualified, but he would not quit until he finished.

In the 1992 Olympics, Derek Redmond of Great Britain, about halfway through the 400 meters race tore a hamstring. Redmond hobbled the rest of the way with the help of his father, who rushed from the grandstands to aid his son. He came in last, but he finished.

In the 1968 Olympics held in Mexico City, Tanzania's John Stephen Akhwari, with his right leg bloody and bandaged, staggered into the stadium more than an hour after the winner had crossed the line. He said afterwards, "My country did not send me to Mexico City to start the race. They sent me to finish the race."

As believers, we represent a heavenly country and we have not been left here just to start the race, but to finish the race

5. THAT NEED IS KEEPING A HIGH STANDARD... TOGETHER

Philippians 3:15, "All of us who are mature should take such a view of things."

Christians who pursue the goal God has given them for their lives do much better when they have the support of others who are doing the same thing. That is especially true in times of suffering and crisis. Benjamin Franklin said it at the signing of the declaration of independence, "we must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." God never meant for us to do it alone. We are to depend up on one another in the church for support and encouragement.

Fellowship Bible Church

Pastor: Don Griffin

There is an old hymn called “higher ground” that we used to sing that sums up the desire of the Apostle Paul.

I'm pressing on the upward way,
new heights I'm gaining every day;
still praying as I'm onward bound,
lord, plant my feet on higher ground.
Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
by faith, on heaven's table land,
a higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

Are you moving ahead in the race God has given you to run? The race may seem long and hard, but it will soon be over. Run in such a way that when it is all over, you will be glad for what you did.