

Natalie W. Bell
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Go for the Goal!
Philippians 3:12-16

Listen to the words of Paul in Philippians 3:12-16

Hear God's word for you today:

*Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I **press on** to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*

*13 Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,***

*14 I **press on toward the goal** for the **prize** of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us then who are mature be of the **same mind**; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you.*

16 Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

Last week we talked about **WHO WE ARE**,

And what **really defines us--**

Is it exterior things ...or

Is it our **heart**, and our **faith**?

Today Paul continues by talking about the life of faith AS A RACE,
with **a goal, a prize**—of knowing **Jesus**.

I often FEEL LIKE LIFE IS A RACE...don't you?

And when I think of life that way, it can make me so **tired**.

Life seems to be a race that I'm not anywhere close to finishing,

And I don't feel like I'm winning any prizes!

So, what does Paul MEAN?

Paul had been running **a different race**, as we heard last week--

A race to be a great leader,

With a **resume** of accomplishments.

His goal was to **win the race** of being right, and holy,
a success.

He was keeping **score** of everything and **counting every step**.

Do we ever find OURSELVES doing the same thing?

Running the race of life, and keeping score?

Of what we've done right? And wrong?

Paul did, UNTIL Jesus found him on the road to DAMASCUS,

Changing his identity from Saul, to Paul

and sending him in a ***new direction***—to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ!

Paul thought that FOLLOWING EVERY LETTER of God's law

was the only way to live.

Then Jesus came along, and ***freed him***.

Jesus showed him that real faith can be a ***relationship*** with Him,

And in fact, Jesus is the ***fulfillment*** of God's law.

KNOWING JESUS is different than just following the law.

Before he knew Jesus, Paul was running,

and doing a pretty good job according to a lot of people.

But where was he headed?

Ever found ***yourself running in the wrong direction***,

even though it feels right?

I once heard the story of Minnesota Vikings ***Jim Marshall***,

in a 1964 NFL game against San Francisco,

when he took off running to the end zone.

He heard the crowd roaring,

saw his teammates waving.

He cruised down, celebrated a touchdown,

And that's when he realized....

He had run the wrong way!

The announcer had been yelling the whole time:

Marshall is running the wrong way!

Sadly, the only person who didn't realize it, was Jim Marshall.

Or maybe we're like the man ***driving down the highway***

whose wife called him on his cellphone to tell him to watch out,
because she heard on the news that there was a crazy person
driving the **wrong way** down the highway.

And the man replied, “*You’re not kidding, honey –
there’s not just ONE crazy person going the wrong way;*

I see lots of them!” From a sermon by Jeremy Troxler. Oct. 2, 2011, in Duke University Chapel.

Can you IDENTIFY?

I sure can!

I can identify with trying hard to get it right,
to make things work out,
only to find that I’m driving the **wrong way**.

Paul REALIZED something important for all of us to know:

God **doesn’t just want law-abiding Christians**.

God wants **sons and daughters**—a relationship with us!

Which is **different** than trying to keep **score**, isn’t it?

We are so often STRIVING TO DO THINGS THE RIGHT WAY,

which is usually **OUR** way...

But are we leaving God out?

What if we FOCUSED on a RELATIONSHIP with God?

What if we saw Jesus as someone we want **to know and love....**

And asked him to help us in our journey of faith?

Paul made a 180-DEGREE TURN from his life as Saul.

He realized that reaching the goal was not about what’s on the **outside**,

But what’s on the **inside—in our hearts**.

The **real GOAL** in faith, is a **heart that knows Jesus**.

The question is: is that **OUR goal**?

Is our relationship with Jesus a PRIORITY?

Or are we **SETTLING** for something less?

Are we **trying to be good, look good, impress** other people or God....

when instead, we could have a **life-changing relationship** with Jesus?

Often **we settle** for what we **THINK ARE THE BEST PRIZES** in life.
 Friends, family, finances, health, security become our goals.
 And these things are not bad, but they are not the prize of faith!

C.S. Lewis once said that we ARE FAR TOO EASILY PLEASED.

We are content with **Spam** when steak is on the menu....

In the *Weight of Glory* he writes:

We fool about with little things like “drink and sex and ambition when infinite JOY is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum, because he cannot imagine .. a holiday at the sea.”

—from C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

Could that be US?

Earlier in Philippians, Paul says that all his achievements became **like garbage**, in comparison with Jesus.

Has your **life ever felt junky**, when not focused on Jesus?

There is a different way to live!

The late Pastor Tim Keller talks about finding JOY in Christ:

Do you remember when your mother used to say, "Don't eat candy before meals?" Why did she say that?

Because she knew it would ruin your next meal.

*The trouble with eating candy is that it gives you a **sugar buzz**, and then you don't feel hungry....for the real nutrients that you need...*

*Things like power, money, and success—... favorable circumstances—act like **spiritual sugar**.*

Christians who eat these spiritual candies may say,

"Sure, I believe in God and I know I'm going to heaven,"

*but they're actually basing their day-to-day joy on **favorable circumstances**.*

When the circumstances change, it can drive us to God...

*Where we're forced to pursue the **FEAST that our SOULS REALLY CRAVE**.*

*And the **spiritual nutrients we REALLY need**.*

Timothy Keller, pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, from the sermon "Joy," (preached 4-18-10);

It's how PHYSICAL FOOD PALES in comparison
 to the **spiritual food** we get in The Lord's Supper,

a feast we receive with believers everywhere around the world today—
Because it's ***World Communion Sunday!***

Paul says in Philippians 3,
I want to ***know Jesus and the power*** of his resurrection.
Do WE want to know Jesus?

When Father Brennan Manning became a monk,
his superior said that once you come to
truly know the love of Jesus, nothing else is ever as beautiful.

I believe that---that knowing Jesus is ***better than anything***
we could ever imagine!
And the ***love*** of Jesus is beyond our imagination!

But knowing that, and receiving it,
means ***embracing*** a life of faith,
And ***receiving*** God's love---each one of us,
And all of us together, as the body of Christ.

In the book "BORN TO RUN," by Christopher McDougall,
He argues that most people are ***running the WRONG way -- literally.***
We view running as ***a means to an end***, like getting in shape or living longer,
and when we run, we try to protect ourselves
by padding our feet with the latest high-tech running shoes.

McDougall describes the TARAHUMARA INDIAN TRIBE OF MEXICO.
A tribe that has honed the ability to run hundreds of miles
without rest, or injury!
Because when they run, they wear only ***simple sandals***,
and from a young age they learn to run upright,
on the ***front pads of their feet***
instead of on the arches or heels, the way our shoes encourage us to run.

They also believe that that RUNNING IS A WAY OF LIFE.
Running isn't a chore, or a means to an end.
It's ***a GIFT***, in and of itself!

In the book a well-known TRACK COACH watches

two Tarahumara runners compete in an ***ultramathon*** of 100 miles through the mountains (can you imagine?), studying their technique, trying to figure out what makes them tick, and what lessons he can take back to his own track team.

But what strikes the coach isn't their technique;

It's their ***JOY!***

The runners race up one of the course's most challenging hills, and they are ***LAUGHING, like little kids*** playing in a leaf pile!

What makes them special is that they

haven't forgotten what it means to LOVE running.

From a sermon by Jeremy Troxler. Oct. 2, 2011, in Duke University Chapel. Source: McDougall, Christopher. *Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen*. Random House, 2011.

What if our race of faith was filled with JOY?

What brings YOU JOY in your life of faith?

Why do you show up, for worship?

For service?

Why do you come to this Lord's table?

Why are you part of this family of faith?

And what do you love about following Jesus?

Being able to identify that, helps us ***FIND JOY---***

It also helps us ***SHARE the joy***, with others!

I LOVE pastoring,

I love getting to know you, and being in your lives....

Especially when God makes ordinary moments ***sacred***.

I love that no matter how many times I read the same Bible,

There is ***always something NEW*** to learn!

And every worship service holds something special!

What do YOU LOVE about faith?

What do you love about ***this church?***

And have you ever ***TOLD anyone*** about that love?

What if we are BORN FOR the race of faith—and a ***relationship*** with Jesus?

What if we are made to keep our ***eyes on THAT prize,***

and actually ***enjoy*** our journey of faith?

Even when we face uphill battles?

Even when times are tough, and we feel like we can't go on?

What if just knowing Jesus gives us the JOY

that can ***sustain us*** through the toughest times?

That's what KEEPS ME GOING!

I can smile on Sunday, not because everything is great,

but because ***God is great.***

And Jesus knows and loves us, so much more than we can imagine.

Following Jesus is a good life, because God is good.

Hear the ***GOOD NEWS*** of the Gospel today:

We were ***born to run a race of faith,***

Toward the goal of knowing Jesus Christ.

May we find ***JOY in that journey.***

And let all God's people say, Amen.