

# The 2 Things It Takes to Finish Well

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     What does it take to finish well? You ask, what are you talking about? Well, I'm talking about finishing the race of this life well. How can we look back at the end of our life and say, I've run a good race, and I'm not ashamed of anything, and I know that I've accomplished what God wants me to accomplish. The Apostle Paul is dealing with that exactly in our text this morning. So let's go ahead and take a look. We'll be focusing on verse number 13 in the book of Philippians chapter number 3 at the latter half of that verse. Let's go ahead and get started this morning at verse number 13 in Philippians chapter number 3. I'll go ahead and read the entire verse, but we're going to be spending our time in the latter portion of that verse this morning. Verse number 13 starts out, Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, I pray for those who are listening to this this morning, and I pray, Father, that you may be able to be with each one, meet each one's needs, dear God, and may you use your word this morning to reach our hearts and our minds for you. Help us to be able to learn what it takes to finish well. We thank you, Father, for what you are going to teach us today. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Last week, we looked at Paul's sanctified dissatisfaction with his Christian life.

Now, what he was talking about was that he, although he was mature, he hadn't grown as much as he knew he could. He hadn't reached his full potential yet. Now, he was over the moon, satisfied with Jesus. We know that by verse number 10, but he wasn't satisfied with his Christian life. He knew there was room for progress. He knew that there was more room for growth. He wasn't finished with the race of his life yet.

So, our question this morning is, how do we progress in the Christian life? How do we grow? How do we progress in such a way as to win this race of life? How do we get to the end? And ultimately here, well done, thou good and faithful servant. It begins with a sanctified dissatisfaction. We talked about that last week. But what we're doing now is seeing how that continues. It continues where we left off last week. Now, first of all, it takes today a singular devotion, a single-mindedness, a single, singular devotion to Jesus Christ. We see that in the second part of verse number 13. Paul says there, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind. He says this one thing. Now, one thing is a phrase that is important in the Christian life. We hear Jesus' words. He says, one thing thou lackest.

He said that to the self-righteous, rich, young ruler. Mark chapter 10, verse number 21. One thing is needful. Jesus explained to a busy Martha as she criticized her sister in Luke chapter 10, verse number 42. One thing I know, exclaimed the man who had received his sight by the power of Jesus Christ in John chapter 9, verse number 25. The psalmist said, one thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after in Psalm 27 and verse number 4. The thing is today, too many Christians are involved in too many things. I believe Paul is speaking of what's going on in the lives of so many believers. When the secret of our progress is to concentrate on the one thing. So many of us are looking at so many different things. Now, I don't believe that the Apostle Paul necessarily is speaking of life pursuits because our life would be dull if we were simply one-dimensional.

[ 5 : 16 ] We are not simply just a husband or a wife or a mother or a father or a brother or a sister or a son or a daughter or an employer or employee, a business owner. We may also be a gardener. We may also be a quilter or a fisherman and so on. The one thing that I believe the Apostle Paul is speaking of is that we don't hang our hat on multiple things to make us right with God. And that was a reference to what the Judaizers were trying to teach these Philippian believers. It was that it was okay and it was fine for them to trust Christ as their Savior. But they had to add other things. They had to add the rituals. They had to add circumcision and other things to be right with God. Paul certainly was not speaking of the rubbish of our good works like Paul mentions in the previous verses, but rather a singular devotion to

Jesus Christ. The one thing that he was referring to. And as well, we should be who God made us to be.

Because we can't be all things to all people all the time. There are certain things that we may not be able to do. There are certain people we may not be able to reach. But we have to ask ourselves, is this where I'm most effective? Am I doing what God wants me to do? Am I where I'm the most effective?

It was just that kind of decision that was a turning point in D.L. Moody's life. Before the tragedy of the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, Moody was involved in a lot of different things. He was involved in Sunday school promotion, YMCA work, evangelistic meetings, and a lot of other activities. But after the fire, he determined to devote himself exclusively to evangelistic work. This one thing I do really became a reality to him. And as a result, millions of people heard the gospel.

Many people came to know Jesus Christ as their Savior because Moody determined to do the one thing, to focus on one thing. What we need to do as we run the race of this Christian life is to devote ourselves to running the Christian race, to devote ourselves and focus on Jesus Christ.

[ 8 : 17 ] Just like runners, just like athletes in whatever type of athletic pursuit, they succeed by specializing.

They succeed by doing the one thing. There are a few athletes who can do many different types of sports well. And so the thing is for them to focus on that one thing. Winners are those who concentrate, who keep their eyes on the goal and let nothing distract them. They're devoted entirely to their calling. Like Nehemiah, the wall building governor. He replied to the distracting invitations by saying, I'm doing a great work so that I cannot come down. Nehemiah chapter 6 verse 3.

James tells us in chapter 1 verse number 8, a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. The secret to our power is concentration. Concentrating on the one thing like the Apostle Paul did in our Christian life. A river, if it's allowed to overflow its banks, when that happens, the area around it becomes a swamp. But if that river is dammed and controlled, it becomes a source of great power. It's wholly a matter of values and priorities and living for what matters the most. Paul was living for what mattered the most. And then secondly, our second need is a future-oriented direction.

Or that is a future focus. We're focused on that which is ahead. Let's take a look at Philippians chapter 3, the last part of verse number 13, where the Apostle Paul says, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead.

The person without Christ typically is controlled by the past and allows the past to keep them from possibly reaching their full potential. Maybe they're looking at their past mistakes and they're wondering how they can get beyond that. But the Christian race or but the Christian running the race looks toward the future. Imagine what would happen on a race course if a charioteer looked behind or the runner ran while they were looking behind them. You know, it's bad enough for a plowman to look back.

[ 11 : 05 ] We see that in Luke chapter 9 in verse number 62. It wouldn't be, they wouldn't have straight rows. But for a runner or a charioteer to look back wouldn't mean a possible collision or maybe even serious injury. The thing is, I believe what, where we go wrong is we're accustomed to looking at time and saying past, present, and future.

But maybe we should view time as flowing from the future into the present and then into the past. Or at least the belief in being future oriented, forgetting those things which are behind. Like Paul said, forgetting the past, forgetting those things which are behind. Because the reality is, we can't go back and fix the past. We can't go back and fix the past. There are no redos in life. We cannot go back and change what we've done, change a decision we made, or change something that we chose not to do.

So let's not allow the past to be a snag that would keep us from a better future or running the race and finishing the race well.

Finishing this life well. But you may be saying, well, what if I can't forget the past? Well, the reality is, we need to keep in mind, the thing is, we need to keep in mind that in biblical terminology, to forget doesn't mean to fail to remember.

There's a difference. Forget, when the Bible talks about forgetting, doesn't mean that we erase our memory, that we forget, just simply means to fail.

[ 13 : 07 ] It doesn't mean to fail to remember. It simply means that we choose not to let it hang us up. Because apart from senility or hypnosis or a brain malfunction, no mature person can forget what's happened in the past.

It's an impossibility. Maybe you've heard the term forgive and forget. Well, that's not humanly possible. We will never forget.

Because what happens is, if we try to forget it, and think we've forgiven someone, if the next time we remember it, it may bring all of those feelings flooding back, and we may realize that we truly are still, we haven't forgotten.

We're still holding it against them. We may wish we could erase certain bad memories, but we cannot. To forget in the Bible.

And here's a key, I believe, to having a future focus, and being able to not look back. So when Paul says forgetting those things which are behind, he's not saying, let's perform some type of mental gymnastics, and we will somehow erase it from our mind.

[ 14 : 26 ] But to forget in the Bible simply means no longer to be influenced or affected by. That we choose not to let the past influence our present or our future.

Not to be affected by it. We have a different outlook. We have a future look. And when God promises, and there's sins and iniquities, I will remember, will I remember no more?

In Hebrews chapter 10, verse 17, I don't believe God is somehow suggesting that he'll conveniently get a bad memory. Because that's impossible with God.

God cannot forget. Because then he would cease to be God. Because a moment in time, from our perspective, for him would not have happened. So he doesn't literally, from what I read in scripture, he doesn't literally forget.

But what God chooses to, is no longer to hold it against us. He no longer allows that to influence the way he looks at us today.

[ 15 : 31 ] What God is saying is, I will no longer hold their sins against them. Their sins can no longer affect their standing with me, or influence my attitude toward them.

So we can't forget, but we can choose not to allow it, to influence our present or our future. So forgetting those things which are behind, doesn't suggest an impossible feat of mental and psychological gymnastics, by which we try to erase the sins of the past.

Now we know that, according to scripture, those are all covered under the blood. Those are, technically, those are erased. But we still can remember those things.

And if we're not careful, we may allow them to cause us to be tripped up, because we are still allowing them to influence us in our daily life, or still allowing them to affect us.

So what I believe the Apostle Paul is saying here, is when we choose to not allow it to affect us, it simply means that we break the power of the past by living for the future.

[ 16 : 50 ] To break the power of our past by living, to change our living for the future. We can't change the past. We can change the meaning of the past.

There were things in Paul's past that could have been weights to hold him back. 1 Timothy chapter 2, verses 12 through 17, list a few of those, but rather they became inspirations for the Apostle Paul that helped him to speed ahead.

The events in his past didn't change, but his understanding of them changed. A good example of this principle is Joseph in Genesis chapter 45.

Do you remember when we alluded to this last week, when Joseph met his brothers the second time, and he finally reveals himself to them, we see that he held no grudge against his brothers.

Now, to be sure, they had mistreated him. I mean, they sold him into slavery. What's worse than that is, almost all his brothers except one wanted to kill him.

[ 18 : 04 ] I mean, that's how much they despised their brother. He didn't forget that. He knew that. But he chose not to hold it against them.

But when he saw, but what happened was, Joseph began to see the past from God's point of view. He saw the way God's hand was upon his life.

And as a result, he was not able to hold anything against his brothers. He chose for it not to affect his present and his future. 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, looking back and saying, oh, if only I had not.

And they allow that to keep them from being able to have joy in the presence. They're running the race by trying to look backward, trying to live the Christian life by looking at their past.

[ 19 : 14 ] No wonder so many Christians stumble and fall and get in the way of other Christians. Some Christian runners are distracted not only by maybe the failures of their past or maybe the sins of their past, but it's also possible for us to be distracted by the successes of our past.

We look back and say, and we think about the good old days. We think about how good things used to be, or we think about the successes that we had at one time.

And this is just as bad. The things which are behind need to be set aside, and the things which are before need to take their place.

So this week, let's begin to practice the forward look. Let's focus on the one thing. Focus on Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone, and let's begin to practice that forward look, choosing not to allow the past to hold us back, not allow the past to affect us or influence us, and simply look ahead and allow the past to inform our future and look at the past from the way God sees it.

Literally, he's chosen to forget those things. He's chosen not to hold our past against us. So it's possible to have a sanctified dissatisfaction with where we are in our life, and devotion and direction, and still lose the race and the reward.

[ 21 : 00 ] What we're going to do is we're going to find out next week when we look at the fourth essential. Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you so very much for the promises you give us in your word, and the direction that you give us as well to focus on our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ, and to not allow our past to weigh us down or to cause us to miss out on a better future.

So Father, I pray for each one today, this week, that we may be able to focus on you and focus on our future and focus on the future that you have for us.

Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless. Amen.