**CHOOSE JOY**

**A Winning Attitude in Life**

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**Philippians 3:12-4:1**

**I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. 13No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.**

**15Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. 16But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.**

**17Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. 18For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. 19They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. 20But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. 21He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.**

**4 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.**

Intro:

**Olympic Race pictures**

This is like one of those future corporate slogans…something to inspire you. I like that stuff – you can get cynical about those gut check things but hopefully there’s something that still inspires a person about looking forward – about forward thinking…Philippians is an inspiring book. We all need to be inspired.

We are internally wired to have a desire to get the most out of life.

Advertisers know about this basic human desire that we have and produce it into slogans:

It’s inspiring to see a race run well not like we have to freak out and go crazy but to relentlessly go forward with a goal in life.

 All of us want to be inspired – to reach goals and see dreams realized and have ambitions.

What are the goals and dreams worth realizing? What do we live for?

Joy comes from reaching dreams and enjoying the process of getting there.

Paul refers to the Olympics. Olympic dreams. Ambition. You have to be incredibly ambitious.

Last week – “I want to know Christ….” It’s a personal relationship.

A winning strategy. Coach is in there giving the game plan. What will you rehearse in your mind.

Watching the moguls event. They rehearse the whole run and mentally envision it.

Life is more than the limitations of an event – much more complicated.

1. **Press in for Progress….not perfection**

**I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.**

**16But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.**

We can get totally psyched out by the goal – perfection. Jesus is perfect and we focus on him as our ideal but we humbly accept that we are a work in progress.

Illust: Eugenie Bouchard

Illust:

Illust: Susanne and I used to run together – I thought it would be motivational for her for me to run like one step ahead of her. One day she just got honest with me and said, “This isn’t motivating for me…I feel like I’ll never catch up to you and it’s a mental game. I’ll run at the pace I can run at and you running one step ahead is actually de-motivating to me.”

Here’s what Jesus does…he knows the pace of our run…he’s not like cattle prodding us. He’s there beside us to encourage us and to pick us up when we fall. He knows the route…he has run the race and he knows the path we need to run. He says, don’t go there – that’s going to ruin the race for you.

A Christ – follower is always saying where next Jesus – what do you want me to do next – where do you want to direct my life…you show me the course.

Self-evaluation can be a dangerous thing, because we can err in two directions: (1) making ourselves *better* than we are, or (2) making ourselves *worse* than we really are. Paul had no illusions about himself; he still had to keep “pressing forward” in order to “lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold” of him. A divine dissatisfaction is essential for spiritual progress. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:1–2).

1. **The Past is Over …forget it.**

**I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead**

Illlust: Sara Corniel coaching girls team and you have made a mistake. Closes her hands. God does that. He says it is behind….leave it behind.

The past can either be a point of shame or a point of pride.

 Paul, just like all of us had a past to forget. He had tortured and murdered many innocent people. He had caused a lot of pain and had done much damage to the cause of Christ.

“forgetting those things which are behind” does not suggest an impossible feat of mental and psychological gymnastics by which we try to erase the sins and mistakes of the past. *It simply means that we break the power of the past by living for the future*. We cannot change the past, but 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 Tim. 1:12–17), but they became inspirations to speed him ahead. The events did not change, but his understanding of them changed.

At least, the believer should be future-oriented, “forgetting those things which are behind.” Please keep in mind that in Bible terminology, “to forget” does not mean “to fail to remember.” Apart from senility, hypnosis, or a brain malfunction, no mature person can forget what has happened in the past. We may wish that we could erase certain bad memories, but we cannot. “To forget” in the Bible means “no longer to be influenced by or affected by.” When God promises, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 10:17), He is not suggesting that He will conveniently have a bad memory! This is impossible with God. 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.”

A good example of this principle is Joseph (Gen. 45:1–15). When he met his brothers the second time and revealed himself to them, 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 the 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.

Just like Paul had to make a choice, so do we. Maybe you’ve had a bad experience just lately or maybe you did something long ago that you regret. Maybe the memories keep coming back to haunt you from living a full life today.

Well guess what? Many people have, but we must forget the past! It’s over. It’s done. It’s gone. It can’t hurt you anymore. There’s nothing you can do to change it. The only thing that you can do is, “Forget it and move on.”

Guess what? Our game is only half over. Regardless of the past, we still have the rest of the game to play. So What If The Enemy Scored Off Of You in The Past! God is willing to forget about the mistakes of the first half. And He expects us to do the same!!!

In **Isaiah 43:25** it says, **"I--yes, I alone--am the one who blots out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again.”**

In **Jeremiah 31:34** it says, **"And I will forgive their wickedness and will never again remember their sins."**So you can forget the bad things that you did – you can also forget the bad things that were said or done to you.

Maybe as you were growing up , from you parents or your peers or your teachers you heard words like “You’ll never make it” or “You’re just a dreamer or “You’ll never amount to anything.”

Maybe you sort of dismiss that stuff but it’s had a bigger effect on you than you think. Especially for guys – we hate to admit weakness or how someone else has affected us. But the reality is that as you grow up and you hear those kinds of words – they hurt and subconsciously you are repeating those words to yourself and living them out.

So how do you deal with that internal stuff – those tapes that you play. Sometimes that’s a long process and it helps to go to a trained counselor to walk that road with.

I also want to say that Jesus wants to speak healing into your life. He wants you to come to him and listen to the words he would want to speak to your heart. He will say some very specific things to your heart if you stop and ask and listen. He will help you to pinpoint what the lies are that you have internalized and then he may give you a vision of himself and he will speak truth to you. You can use the power of the promises in the bible to replace the lies that have poisoned you with the truth of who you are.

You also have to move past your own achievements. Pride or coasting
Many of you probably have heard and remember the Bruce Springsteen song, “Glory Days,” about the guy who can’t quit thinking about all the fun he had back in high school. He says, “Time slips away and leaves you with nothing but boring stories of Glory Days.”
Many people zero in on one good period of time in their life - and spend the rest of their lives trying to relive the past. Maybe it was high school, college, when you first got married, when the kids were young, and etc.
 But you see, Paul knew that a good past was not enough to guarantee a meaningful future.
**I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.** **Philippians 3:7**

Paul was saying “I will not live in the past. My reason for living is to be like Jesus, and whatever happened yesterday, good or bad, is now ancient history. I will live for Jesus today.”
One thing we can know for certain is this, “God never consults your past to determine your future.”

1. **Reach for the Finish Line…it’s all things made new in heaven**

**…reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.**

In this paragraph, it is Paul the athlete. Bible students are not agreed as to the exact sport Paul is describing, whether the footrace or the chariot race. Either one will do, but my own preference is the chariot race. The Greek chariot, used in the Olympic Games and other events, was really only a small platform with a wheel on each side. The driver had very little to hold on to as he raced around the course. He had to lean forward and strain every nerve and muscle to maintain balance and control the horses. The verb “reaching forth” in Philippians 3:13 literally means “stretching as in a race.”

**18For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. 19They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth.**

I acquired more toys than my friends have….I excelled in my career and got more promotions than any in my graduating class….The business I ran exceeded the profits of all the other businesses…..I I was a good guy – probably treated people better than everyone else…wrong race.

There are many people who will come to the end of their lives and go…I gave all that for the wrong race? I can only imagine how much despair that would generate in the pit of ones stomach. And the bible is very clear that there is a right race and a wrong race…and you get DQed if you run the wrong race. God is the judge, he’s totally fair and impartial and he says what the rules are in the race. He says…here’s the right race – it’s completely committing yourself to the person of Jesus. You can run another race very sincerely and completely and be sincerely and completely wrong. The race is all about Jesus Christ…our forgiver…and we all need forgiveness and our leader…and we all need and leader because we’re lost in life without a leader.

Paul, the writer of Philippians wasn’t always in this right race. His race was another religion, it was about doing good works, getting the right education, being in the right social circles. He did really good in that race…he was in fact on the top of the heap. But then he dramatically met Jesus and he experienced grace and forgiveness and a whole new direction and he got on the right track.

Paul says “The race I was in before? What was that? I was running in circles – it wasn’t worth the effort. Why run that race – that’s a rat race.

In comparison to the race that I’m in now with Christ – it’s as worthless as garbage. The whole purpose of this race is to love and serve your creator. To run the race Jesus ran which was to bring honor to God.

You may be here and you know you have never entered the right race.

You can’t finish your race and receive your reward until first you enter the race. Some of you have been warming up for years. You’re still in the parking lot. You’re not even in the stadium. You’ve been saying, “One of these days I’m going to give my life to Christ. One of these days I’m going to get serious about God.” Today is your day. The good news is that Jesus Christ has paid your entrance fee and now you’re eligible to run. You need to pray this prayer, “Jesus, I want to get to know You. I want to learn to love You and serve the purposes that You put me on earth to do. I want to learn to trust You and live for You. In Your name I pray. Amen

**20But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. 21He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.**

The citizens of Philippi were privileged to be Roman citizens away from Rome. When a baby was born in Philippi, it was important that its name be registered on the legal records. When the lost sinner trusts Christ and becomes a citizen of heaven, his name is written in “the Book of Life” (Phil. 4:3).

Citizenship is important.

Focus on your first day with Jesus

We all avoid the d word. Or we trivialize it. Paul talks about the fact that to die is actually even better than living. Paul had this incredibly inspiring outlook on life because death wasn’t the ultimate losing line at the end of the race…it was the winning line. How do you approach life if the inevitable is a losing line at the end of the race….you try to make detours and extensions…death…hey, that’s great! Paul says…I’m heading to a winning line…it’s Jesus.

We don’t talk about it sometimes until it’s staring us in the face – death is inevitable and eternity is real. This life is not all that we got – we all know we’re wired and built for something beyond this life.

Even atheists get spiritual when their mortality is staring them in the face.Illus: atheist and the bear.

  An atheist was taking a walk through the woods. "What majestic trees!What powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!" he said to himself.   As he continued walking alongside the river he heard a rustling in the bushes. Turning to look, he saw a 7 foot grizzly charging towards him. He ran as fast as he could up the path. Looking over his shoulder he saw that the bear was closing in on him. His heart was pumping frantically and he tried to run even faster.   He tripped and fell on the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up but saw the bear raising his paw to take a swipe at him.   At that instant the atheist cried out: "Oh my God!..." Time stopped. The bear froze.  The forest was silent.   It was then that a bright light shone upon the man and a voice came out of the sky saying:   "You deny my existence for all of these years, teach others I don't exist and even credit creation to a cosmic accident. Do you expect me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to count you as a believer?"  The atheist looked directly into the light.   "It would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask you to treat me as a Christian now, but perhaps, could you make the BEAR a Christian?"   "Very well," said the voice. The light went out, and the sounds of the forest resumed.   And then the bear lowered his paw, bowed his head and spoke:   "Lord, bless this food which I am about to receive and for which I am truly thankful, Amen. "

When you are a follower of Jesus – you look forward to being with him…it’s beyond our comprehension but an incredible reality.

Paul talks about this in verse 14, **I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.**

**Philippians 3:14**

What is the prize?

The prize is hearing Jesus Christ say, “Well done – you’ve been a good and faithful servant.”

 The prize is knowing that you’re one and only life was well lived and made a difference. That you ran it full out.

That you finished well.

Illust: Julianna running the 600 metres – she ran a great 200 metre

Some folks flame out early…Some people just lose sight of the prize – of eternity with Jesus – he’s worth living completely for.

Look forward to finishing well – it isn’t always the swiftest or the brightest that win the prize

Did you see the focus involved in the race? The focus is completely forward. You might ask “Well how far forward do I focus? I want to encourage you to focus on two things – on eternity, which could be tomorrow – you never know – or it could be years away and on Jesus , whos always walking beside us and in many ways walking one step ahead of us.

Illust: Julianna running the 200 instead of the 600

Illust: Snowboarder celebrating before getting across the finish line

Jesus- centred or Self- centred ambition.

God’s honor or our honor

What will last

1. **Enjoy Winning as a Team…inspire each other**

**I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord.**

I find it hard to imagine living like this. Can you imagine living like this?

Can you imagine if we all lived like this – like everyone together?

Illust: happy Gilmore Junue story. Inspired by his sacrifice and inspired to be faster in his starts. 4 hundredths of a second.

We make each other better the more we are around each other. It is not a solo journey.

The race of life is also about knowing that Jesus is in the race with you. You’re not doing it alone.

This guy is there to run a part of the race. You need a team to do this race.

You need a running partner to do the Christian race.

Your leader is Jesus – he’s your running partner. You can take the next step. Don’t let discouragement enter in.

Conclusion:

I’m not gonna focus on my past successes – pride and I’m not going to focus on my past failures – pit of despair. I’m looking forward one step – this is a race that Jesus has run and he’s there, right beside me, in fact he’s always a step ahead of me.

In many ways the race of life is much more like an adventure race than a sprint or even a marathon or extreme race.

Illus: Adventure racing – you don’t really know the course, you understand the general parameters – there’s some basic rules like no hitch hiking, no obstructing another boat, no holding on to another racer, not cutting off the trail.

But you have to know that at each stage of the race, there will be someone there to give you directions for the next stage. And you will eventually get to the finish line.

In this life, you can’t always see the finish line…you don’t know where the course will take you. You can be guaranteed, it will be the adventure God has for you…there will be some hard times along the way…but he will be there to give you directions, he’s done the course before.…he’ll be there to encourage you….he’ll be beside you and just ahead of you. He will lead you through the maze of life.

My last question today is: Are you maximizing your life? Are you running the adventure race God has given you? Are you making a difference for eternity? If you haven’t been, the starting gun can go off for you today. Do you intend to finish well? Are you committed to forgetting the past and looking forward?

 Pray this in your mind: “Dear God, I don’t want to focus on the past, I want to look forward. I want to finish the race that you put me on earth for. I want to finish it well. I’m sorry for the times I’ve lost my focus and entered worthless races. I’m sorry for getting focused on the past, the bad and the good. I want my life to be worthwhile and I know that is only by looking forward and walking completely with you. Help me to look forward to eternity and the joy that lies ahead. They matter so much more than anything here. Help me to realize that none of this is going to last. It’s all temporary. I want to live for your glory for the rest of my life.”

For our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20, nasb). The Greek word translated “conversation” or “citizenship” is the word from which we get the English word “politics.” It has to do with one’s behavior as a citizen of a nation. Paul is encouraging us to have the spiritual mind, and he does this by pointing out the characteristics of the Christian whose citizenship is in heaven. Just as Philippi was a colony of Rome on foreign soil, so the church is a “colony of heaven” on earth.

**Our Names Are on Heaven’s Record**