

But One Thing

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 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, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
(Phil 3:12-14)

We'd so much like to think that the 'older' we get in the Lord, the saintlier we get. Whole denominations are built on this notion. Of course, there is some validity to this, but there is also a tension, if you would, with it as well. For, the more 'mature' we become in Christ, the more 'taintier' we realize we are in comparison to our dear Savior.

Now, some would characterize Paul as an ever gung-ho, you-can't-hold-me-back kind of guy. Maybe so, but what he is asserting in this passage has much less to do with spiritual accomplishment and much more to do with facing the balance of your life when you know that 'much water has passed under your bridge' so to speak. It is an attitude necessary for finishing well.

Perhaps, you've accomplished much; perhaps, you've suffered much; perhaps, you've failed greatly and repeatedly. Perhaps, there's reason to be proud or thankful, or perhaps, there are woeful regrets. Paul had them all; perhaps you do as well. Towards the end of his life he could justly boast of his

sufferings for Christ as in 2 Cor 11 and yet he came to esteem himself as the 'chief' of sinners (see 1 Tim 1:15).

Focusing on the past, we swing from castigation to congratulation back and forth. Both are balls and chains to the Spirit-filled believer. And of course, Satan knows this so he endeavors to fix our attention there.

But, how will you finish? With a sigh or a shout? With a limp or a leap? Paul said, "I press on" which is a symbolic use of words. You see, the Greek word he used here is most generally translated as 'persecute'. What he was alluding to was that the same fervor he had in persecuting or chasing down the believers before his conversion characterized his chasing down of Christ afterwards.

Paul also said, "I lay hold" which means "to take possession of". Possession of what? The promises of God in Christ. Paul was as fed up as you and I are with the failures of the flesh, but there is one way to deal with them, one thing to do. "...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead". The Greek is more emphatic – "truly forgetting". And, "reaching forward to those things which are ahead"-- picture a racer stretching forward to break the tape. It's been a long race and yet the end is near so the racer stretches forward knowing the final effort is worth it.

For Paul, this wasn't a spiritual 'mid-life crisis' but a resolute determination to consider the past as 'hidden' in Christ and to face

each step in the road ahead with faith and a grand anticipation.

"Together a father and son hiked through the mountains of Washington, Oregon and California. For many days they were alone on the trail, often camping above the 10,000-foot level. They faced every sort of discouragement—lack of food and water, danger from wild animals, danger from robbers they might meet, days of rain and mud, incredible physical exhaustion, the very real possibility of physical injury, not to speak of loneliness, blisters, mosquitoes, and the extremes of heat and cold. Before leaving on the trip, the father discovered that over 90% of those who set out to hike more than 500 miles never make it. Fifty percent never get started and 40% quit after they start. Only 10% ever finish a long-distance hike. After studying the 10% who succeed, he came to certain conclusions. Some of it involved strenuous training and meticulous logistical preparation. But there was something else involved. He discovered that those who succeeded versus those who failed understood that the biggest block was mental. They knew that their real enemy lay within, not without. Those who succeeded made two important decisions: First, they decided they would finish the trip no matter what happened, and second, they expected bad things to happen and decided they would not be surprised or dismayed. So when the rains turned the trail into a quagmire, they didn't quit because they weren't surprised. When black clouds of mosquitoes descended like some Old Testament plague,

they didn't quit because they weren't surprised. When they faced days of loneliness and nights of hunger, they didn't quit because they knew it would be like this. In essence, the successful backpackers adopted a certain mindset. They knew that the key was simply putting one foot in front of the other. You take a step and hit the mud. You take another step and see a bear. You take another step and your legs begin to cramp. You take another step and the crazy people come out of the woods. Doesn't matter. You aren't surprised because you knew the crazy people would show up sooner or later. So you just keep putting one foot in front of the other and eventually your journey is finished."
– Ray Pritchard

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus,...
(Heb 12:1)

It is so worth it to finish well! Like Paul, let's do this 'one thing'. Forget the past, Faith the future. Follow Jesus! All the promises of God are Yes! and Amen! in Him.

Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind;...

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.
(Phil 3:15,20,21)