

## **RUN AND DON'T LOOK BACK**

Phil 3:13-14; Heb.12:1-3

***“But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus”(Phil.3:13-14).***

In this passage, Paul depicts the pursuit of Christ as a race— a marathon. The imagery is that of a runner, whose only goal is to run in such a way as to cross the finish line, and win the prize.

There were two important disciplines that stood out in Paul’s marathon. The first is: “*Forgetting what is behind*” and the second one is, “*Straining toward what is ahead.*”

### **Forgetting What Is Behind**

A runner in a race doesn't keep looking back to see who is behind him, for the risk of tripping and falling on his face. As in every age, there are scores of Christians who start off well in the Christian marathon but who then, with time, and for whatever reason, begin looking back. In doing so, they hinder their race.

The Christians of the letter to the Hebrews after a blessed start had begun to collapse in their spiritual life (Heb.10:32-35). They had grown tired. The writer exhorts them in Hebrews 12:12 to strengthen their feeble arms and weak knees.

Instead of looking towards the goal, they began to turn their eyes to times gone by. They began to look backwards; backwards, to former traditions, to former experiences, to former ways of doing things, etc.

The past Christian life is irrelevant, the ground and laps covered don’t matter any more. What matters is the present. What matters is making the maximum effort on our part in maintaining momentum for the future. Our direction is straight ahead, by faith, looking into the distance, towards the prize.

### **Straining Toward What Is Ahead**

Paul has not obtained his spiritual goal yet, but he is not resting, turning back, or looking around. He had what John MacArthur calls, “*a blessed discontentment.*” He was continually satisfied with his Christ and unsatisfied with himself. That is a healthy condition! It should be every Christian’s situation.

We see Paul “*straining toward*” and “*reaching forth.*” If you watched the sprints and hurdles in the Summer Olympics, you could see that, as the leading runners reached the tape at the goal line, they would lean their body forward. In some of the heats, it was that extension of the body to its uttermost that won the race. Paul is stretching all out to win the race.

Heb. 12:1-2 is a classic passage on running. It tells us how we should run. “*Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with*

*perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”*

Notice the writer is making reference to “*weights*”; weights that should be removed and thrown away. Athletes carried nothing with them in a race. Don’t be scandalized if I tell you those Greek Isthmian runners ran naked on the course. There could be no extra fat, nor extra clothing.

In our lives, we are to “*strip off*” all that hinders our spiritual growth and progress. Anything that prevents us from doing our very best for God has to be put away, discarded. The idea is that we be “*light runners*.” Anything that weighs down our pursuit of Him has to be “*thrown off*.”

Paul doesn’t say what the final reward will be. It definitely can not be eternal life. Eternal life is a free gift, to those who believe. It is something we don’t deserve or earn. The prize on the other hand is something we sweat for, and gain by hard work. Of course, it is God’s grace in our lives, which will allow for all this.

The prize, I believe, will be what is called the “*victor’s crown*”, that imperishable crown stored up for the winners.

In the Grecian games when the race was over, the winners were called up to a raised platform, whereby the judge would hand out the prize— a laurel wreath. It was a crown of leaves, which would soon wither. That’s all the winning athletes got, besides a little fame, which would also soon wither.

Our crowning day is the day of Christ’s return. He will call us up to meet Him in the air, at the trumpet sound. The race will have terminated and the handing out of imperishable crowns will have begun. The Christians who were not disqualified for that honour will receive the reward. Each crown shall be engraved with the initials WD — well done, my good and faithful servant. And moreover, according to 2 Peter 1:11 they receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Is that your aspiration? Then keep you eyes on Jesus—fastened, riveted to Jesus. He is our goal.

For Him, the race course stretched from Heaven to Bethlehem, then on to Gethsemane and Calvary, then out of the tomb and back to Heaven. He never faltered or turned back. He kept His eyes fixed on the coming glory enduring the cross and scorning its shame.

*“For those who hope in the Lord, will renew their strength; they will run and not grow weary, and they will walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).*

Soli Deo Gloria