

In May 1954, Roger Bannister (**picture**) became the first man ever to run a mile in under 4 minutes. But the following month, Australian John Landy (**picture**) beat Bannister's record by 1.4 seconds. A showdown was inevitable, and in August of that year, the two athletes met for a momentous race at Vancouver. Bannister and Landy were well in front of the pack as they went into the last lap. Just slightly in front of Bannister, Landy looked like he was going to win. But as he approached the finish line, he started to wonder: *Where is Bannister?* His need to know was so strong that he couldn't resist the temptation to look over his shoulder (**picture**). Just as he did, he lost his stride and Roger Bannister raced past him and broke the tape. Later, Landy said, "If I hadn't looked back, I would have won the race."

The Apostle Paul must have been a sports fan. Over and over again he uses examples from sports to make his point. He speaks of wrestling, boxing, running, winning the race, winning the prize, and winning crowns. He talks about the discipline necessary to win and the danger of being disqualified. We're not sure if he played any sports, but he was very acquainted with the athletic world of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. When he summed up his life, he wrote: "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*" (2 Tim. 4:7). The first phrase comes from boxing, the second from running.

In Philippians 3 Paul compared the Christian life to a race. We're not sure if it was a foot race or a chariot race. For Paul the prize at the end of the finish line...is to become like Jesus Christ. As we studied last time, (vss. 10-11) Paul said, *I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing His sufferings, becoming like Him.* His reason for living was to become more and more like Jesus. He was **Living to Win**. As Christians, this must be our reason for living as well.

In Philippians 3:1-11, Paul uses the analogy of an *accountant* to show that the human effort he formerly was counting on for credit with God he'd written off as loss so he could gain Christ as his righteousness. In verses 12-16 he uses the analogy of an *athlete* to show that the Christian life is a marathon in which we must keep pressing on toward the goal. In verses 17-21, he uses the analogy of an *alien* to show that Christians are citizens of heaven and not of this world.

Everyone loves a winner! Every Christian wants to be winning one. What does it take to win spiritually? Paul tells us...

**1. To win spiritually you must have the correct attitude.** Any winning athlete will tell you that attitude is often the difference between victory and defeat. A team that lacks in talent can sometimes defeat a team with much more ability because they have a winning attitude going into the game.

The right attitude is crucial for a healthy spiritual life. The word translated "*to think*" or "*be minded*" (in 3:15, "*think this way*") is used 10 times in Philippians. Remember the theme of Philippians is joy. There's a direct connection between attitude and joy.

The Christian life is a marathon not a sprint. You need the mentality of a long-distance runner to win spiritually. This attitude of viewing Christian growth as a lifelong process is crucial for at least two reasons.

**We have a tendency to want quick fixes and easy answers to difficult problems.** Real change takes hard work and time. In our microwave culture, that's often a shunned concept. If we can do it quick and easy, we will. Many Christians become frustrated and discouraged because life changes don't happen quickly. Consider this – Olympic champions who retire, don't stay in shape the rest of their lives because of their former training. They have to keep working out for the rest of their lives. It's the same spiritually.

It's also vital to maintain this attitude because **It enables us to be gracious and patient with other believers.** When we're honest about our own continued struggles with sin, we're not surprised other believers struggle too. It helps us be more gracious with those who are struggling just as we are.

**Spiritual maturity starts with a dissatisfied process,** "*Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect.*" After at least 25 years as a Christian, Paul still hadn't arrived spiritually. A sanctified sense of spiritual dissatisfaction is essential to progress in the Christian life.

This week I read of a young man who, at his college graduation ceremony, waived his diploma in the air and said, "*It's time to stop learning and start living!*" It's a feeling many graduates have. They've worked hard for four (or more) years. When that diploma is placed in their hands, they're ready to reap the benefits of their hard work. Hopefully, they'll discover that learning doesn't end when you get a degree. No matter what career path you pursue, you need to continue to grow in knowledge of your field so you stay sharp.

Who wants a doctor who hasn't stayed current? A doctor makes a commitment to never stop learning. It's the same in the Christian life. We never reach a point where we can say, "I've arrived."

The term *disciple* doesn't mean expert. It means learner. Following Jesus is a never ending process. As John Newton (**picture**) the author of *Amazing Grace* confessed, "I am not what I should be. I am not what I want to be. I am not what I will be, but praise God I am not what I used to be!"

Spiritual pride is vile. May we at Grace always be a church where we're okay showing up and saying, "I don't have it all together. I'm a mess. I need to admit that I'm still very much in process." Humility is spiritually healthy. It's freeing (and honest) to admit we don't have it all together, and that as long as we're alive we'll continue to be in that process.

**Spiritual maturity is a focused process**, "But one thing I do...I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Twice Paul says, "I press on," meaning "I'm not where I want to be, but I'm going to keep moving in that direction." In our spiritual life direction makes all the difference. We're not Home yet, but aim our steps in that direction. It requires both a sanctified forgetting and a resolute pushing forward.

There's fierce concentration implicit in his words: "one thing I do." It's a secret that applies to being successful. To excel in any area of life, a person must say, "This one thing I do," not "These 20 things I dabble at."

A great artist must say, "One thing I do." A gifted teacher must say, "One thing I do." A championship athlete must say, "One thing I do." A single parent raising her child must say, "One thing I do." A student who wants to graduate with honors must say, "One thing I do."

Greatness comes to those who say with Paul, "One thing I do." It means focusing on the heavenly goal of winning the prize. This phrase covers all that God has for us when we finally stand before Jesus and hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord."

"I press on" is the idea of a hunter doggedly pursuing his prey. What are you pursuing? What are you energized about? The question each of us needs to answer is, "Do I devote myself to knowing Christ and being like Him in the same way an athlete is devoted to winning? Does knowing Christ and growing to be like Him consume me? Or, do I just dabble at it when it's convenient?" If you want to grow spiritually, you've got to put your full effort into it--not just occasionally, but consistently all of the time.

**Spiritual maturity is a forgetful process**, "forgetting what lies behind." There's a reason that when you drive you have a small rearview mirror and a huge windshield. Which one do you spend most of your time looking into?

Living life looking in the rearview mirror is dangerous. Yesterday's a great place to visit, but a terrible place to live. Warren Wiersbe (**picture**) commenting on this verse said: "Do not say, 'Why were the former days better than these?' You do not move ahead by constantly looking in a rear view mirror. The past is a rudder to guide you, not an anchor to drag you. We must learn from the past but not live in the past."

Please keep in mind that in Bible terminology, "to forget" doesn't mean "to fail to remember." No sane person can completely forget what's happened in the past. "To forget" in the Bible means "to no longer to be influenced by or affected by." For example, when God promises, "I will remember their sins...no more" (Heb. 10:17), He's not suggesting that He'll conveniently have a bad memory! That's impossible with God. What God is saying is that He will no longer hold them accountable for their sins.

Forgetting the past means that we break the power of the past by living for the future. Many Christians are living in the past. They long for days that are gone forever. Check out Scripture for yourself. God consistently describes Himself in the present. He told Moses, "I am," not "I was" (Ex. 3:14).

**Spiritual maturity is a changing process**, "Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you." It's not enough to run hard and win the race; the runner must obey the rules. In the ancient Greek games, the judges were very strict about this. Any infringement disqualified the athlete. Winning isn't everything. You must also run the right way.

Remember Lance Armstrong (**picture**)? Once considered a sporting icon and after spending years denying allegations, Armstrong (**picture**), admitted to using performance-enhancing drugs. The cyclist was stripped of his record seven Tour de France victories.

Paul points out that perfection isn't attainable in this life. As we grow and mature, we're constantly aware that we haven't arrived, but we must keep growing. It's vital that we stay teachable and sensitive to the Spirit's direction in our lives. We must keep living in obedience to the light God has shown us and keep seeking Him for more. If God has dealt with some sin in your life, don't slip back into it. If He's cleaned out a dirty closet of your life, don't start throwing junk in there again.

If you want to grow in the Lord, you must maintain a teachable heart. A teachable heart is humble. It's submissive, ready to respond to new light that God gives from His Word. Someone with a teachable heart isn't a Pharisee or an arrogant know-it-all. It's only when we have teachable hearts that we keep moving forward spiritually.

**2. To win the race we must follow the right ones**, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears,

walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.” One of the most impersonated individuals of all time is Elvis (pictures). Impersonators are everywhere and come in all shapes and sizes. There’s a 5 year old Elvis, a 75 year old Elvis, a Spanish Elvis, an Asian Elvis, an African-American Elvis. Some are very good. It’s rumored that Elvis himself occasionally hired good ones to sign autographs for him.

Many view imitation as pretending to be something that you’re not. But God’s Word sees the art of imitation differently. Biblically, imitation isn’t pretending to be something you’re NOT, but as a way to become the best you CAN be. Research has shown that the quickest way to become proficient in any endeavor is to imitate someone who’s already mastered it.

For example, if you want to learn how to shoot a bow and arrow, find someone skilled in archery and do what they do. Hold the bow the way they hold the bow. Stand the way they stand. Tilt your head the way they tilt theirs. If you do this, you’ll progress much faster than if you picked up a bow and arrow and started shooting without any instruction.

The best way to master something is to imitate a master. Paul knew that anyone who wanted to excel in their Christian walk should find a mentor, someone who is obviously maturing. Someone close to the Lord and values that closeness.

In verses 18-19 Paul warns us to be very careful about who we follow. There are professing Christians that we shouldn’t follow. He calls them “enemies of the cross.” They’re destined for eternal hopelessness, driven by sensual appetites, dedicated to material and earthly-things. And it breaks his heart. Did you catch that? “and now tell you even with tears.”

Though they were enemies of the cross, it breaks Paul’s heart. The Lord used that to convict me this past week. Sometimes I get angry at those who are opposed to Jesus when instead, God wants them to break my heart.

Paul isn’t trying to be judgmental. He isn’t saying that Christians are better than non-Christians. He’s simply reminding us that God has placed us in a sinful world full of those opposed to His kingdom. As believers, we’re in the minority. Our mission isn’t to argue or put them down, or shame them. Our Lord wants us to reach out to them, to win them with a tear in our eye.

Two questions: 1) **Who are you following?** Who is up ahead of you showing the way, pointing out the rough places in the road, and making sure you don’t make a wrong turn? We all need people like that. None of us ever reaches a point where we can say, “I can do this on my own.”

Though I’ve been a Christian for nearly 50 years, I find that now as much as ever, I need the encouragement of those who pray better than I do, who witness more than I do, who have a deeper knowledge of God’s Word. I need their example, their encouragement, and the challenge they give me. Who are you following? Are they helping you grow to be more like Jesus?

2) **Who is following you?** Think again about the image of a great parade. Jesus stands at the front followed by a vast throng. You strain to catch a better glimpse of the Lord, but it’s hard to see Him through the crush of people. So you simply begin to follow the crowd in front of you.

As long as they’re following Jesus, you’re following Him through their good example. Now look behind you. Do you see all the faces peering in your direction? They’re following you and you probably didn’t even know it.

As long as you follow those who follow Christ, you’ll be following Him too, and so will those who follow you. Right now someone is following you. Right now someone looks to you to show them the way. Right now someone prays because they heard you pray. Right now someone is watching you fight your personal battles. Right now someone wants to be like you. Right now someone sees Christ in your life. They admire your strength. They’re borrowing your faith because they’re running low. Right now someone believes that you’re the best Christian they know. They’re hanging tough because you’re standing tall. Right now someone is smiling when they think of you and thanks God for your friendship. Right now someone cares that you make the right choices. Right now someone is following you.

My friend stay on the path. Keep your eyes on the prize. Find some good examples and follow them. And don’t forget someone is following you as you follow others who are following Christ. Please don’t let them down.

**3. Our goal line is out of this world,** “But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.” Imagine two young men in their early twenties. Both are of comparable intelligence and natural ability. They live only 20 miles apart, but their circumstances are very, very different.

The first young man lives in a comfortable apartment, drives a nice car, has many fine clothes in his closet, eats well, and is pursuing the career for which he’s just been educated in college. The second young man lives in a dirt-floored shanty, has no car, has only one ragged change of clothes, eats a minimal diet, has no hope for an education, and tries to find manual labor jobs to make ends meet.

What's the difference between these two young men? Citizenship! The first lives in San Diego, California, and is a U.S. citizen. The second lives in Tijuana, Mexico and is a citizen of that country. The way these men live is greatly affected by their citizenships. If the young man from Mexico could somehow move north, acquire his U.S. citizenship, and get an education and a better paying job, his life would change dramatically.

In verses 20-21 Paul uses the analogy of citizenship to show that as citizens of heaven, we're to live differently than those who are citizens of this earth. The word for *citizenship* gives us our English word *politics*. Just as being a citizen of Rome meant that you lived differently than those lacking such a privilege, being a citizen of heaven means you live distinctly, representing your Heavenly Homeland in an alien land where you're temporarily staying.

Citizenship is something the Philippians understood. Philippi was a Roman colony and Roman colonies were amazing places. All over the empire...in strategic sites like the intersection of main roads along which an enemy might march, the Romans would start a colony...a little Roman city.

They were populated by many who were retired soldiers who'd served their time and been rewarded with full citizenship. Each colony was a miniature Rome, no matter how far from Rome might be. Roman dress was worn. Roman magistrates governed. Latin was spoken. Roman justice was administered. Roman morals were observed. Though they weren't in Rome, they still did as the Romans do.

Paul tells the Philippians that just as Roman colonists never forget that they belong to Rome, they must never forget that they're citizens of heaven. Their conduct must match their citizenship. Though separated from heaven, they were a colony of heaven. They didn't belong to the world around them. Their real homeland was heaven.

We must remember the same thing if we want to make progress in our goal of becoming like Christ. We must never forget that we're children of God, joint heirs with Christ. We're in the world, but not of it. We must influence the world, not be influenced by it. Anyone who belongs to Christ marches to a different drummer and obeys different orders.

One major evidence of heavenly citizenship is that you're eager for the King to return, you're eager for Jesus to come back. The word "*await*" is the idea of a child standing on tiptoes waiting for his Daddy to come home from work at the end of the day.

Then, we're expecting a glorious transformation of our earthly bodies. The word "*transform*" comes from a word that's the root of our English word "*schematic*," meaning a drawing or diagram of the inner workings of a device. This chapter ends with a ringing declaration that one day God is going to "*re-schematic*" our physical bodies. They'll be raised from the dead and "re-engineered" to be like His glorious body. In the words of one commentator, we will be "*raised and beautified*." I like the sound of that. I want to be raised and definitely need to be beautified.

And He will do it by the same power that enables Him to run the entire universe. Think of it. No more glasses, no more walkers, no more ICUs, no more cancer, no more false teeth, no more Alzheimer's, no more kidney failure, no more disease and no more death.

**Conclusion:** The Christian life is a race and there are only three reasons you're not in the race today: **1)** you never started, **2)** you stopped running, or **3)** you finished.

If you're still here, you're not finished. If you're not in the race that means either you never started or you stopped running.

If you've never started, let me invite you to begin the race today. Jesus died for your sins so that you would not have to. His forgiveness is immediate, it's free, and indescribably sweet. Will you trust Jesus as your Savior and begin the race today? Trust me, you will never look back!

Or maybe you did start the race a long time ago, but somewhere along the way you stopped running. Perhaps you stumbled and fell, Maybe you just got tired and decided to take a break. If you're sitting on the sidelines, it's time to get back in the race. There's a Savior to serve and a prize to be won. Run in such a way as to finish the race and win the prize.

Getting this will revolutionize your life! Can you imagine the effect all of this would have on our community and even our world if each of us would commit to **Living to Win** for Jesus? If we ran this race of life, seeing every moment, every facet as part of a race to become more like Jesus? Imagine the ramifications of all of us giving our entire lives to God's purposes...to running life's race in such a way as to win this prize...to say as Paul says in our text, "*This one thing I do.*"

What's holding you back? Maybe you've gotten sidelined. Get back in the race. Rededicate yourself to Jesus as Lord of all your life.

Maybe though you don't know Jesus and today you see your need to join us in this run by becoming a Christian. Please trust Him today as your personal Lord and Savior. We'd love to talk with you about that important decision.

Gary Thompson will be available to pray with you at the end of this service. Or reach out to me. I'd love to meet with you and answer your questions and show you from God's Word how you can be forgiven by God and a citizen of heaven. Please just let me know how I can help you.