

Let's Run to Win the Prize

Philippians 3:10-14

Pastor John Miller

In Philippians 3:10-14, Paul says, "...that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 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..."—here's the point—"...I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." In verse 14, Paul tells us what the goal of his life is: It's pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling—or the upward calling—of God in Christ Jesus.

In this passage Paul uses the metaphor of the Christian running a race. I'm not a runner. When I see people running, I think, Why are you doing that to yourself? We have cars. But as Christians, we are in a race. It's not a 100-meter dash; it's a long-distance, endurance race. We're running a race, and we need to run with patience, looking unto Jesus, Who the Bible says is "the author and finisher of our faith." So Paul wanted to run, and he wanted to run well. He wanted to reach the goal, and he wanted to win the prize.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24, Paul says, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain." In the Greek Olympics, the athletes would run, but only one would win the prize. The prize was a laurel wreath that would be put on the head but would quickly wither away. They didn't have gold, silver and bronze, so it was just a bunch of leaves stuck on your head, and then you were honored. We Christians are also running a race, but not for a laurel wreath. We are running for "an incorruptible crown...that fades not away and is reserved in heaven for you."

We're at the end of an old year. We're closing out a year behind us, and we're at the beginning of a new year. And whenever that happens, I think of the saying,

"There is only one life, and it will soon be past.

And only what's done for Christ will last."

Last year what did you do for the kingdom of God? What did you do in serving the Lord and in drawing near to the Lord? Where are you spiritually in your walk with Jesus Christ?

It's a great opportunity when you are making your New Year's resolutions to say, "I want to make a new, fresh commitment in seeking the Lord, praying, spending more time in His Word, walking in the power of the Spirit, drawing close to Jesus and being used by God in the center of His will."

So we, like Paul, want to run the race, we want to reach the goal and we want to win the prize. Here are the questions we need to ask: What is the goal, and how do we get there? Number one, what is the goal we are running toward? Number two, how do we reach that goal that we run toward in this Christian race? Those are the two questions we are going to answer from our text.

First of all, we need to know what the goal is. Paul gives it to us in verses 10-11. Paul says his goal is “that I may know Him” and he wants to know “the power of His resurrection” and he wants to know “the fellowship of His sufferings.” Paul wants to be “conformed to His death, if, by any means...”—“or in any way”—“...I may attain to the resurrection...”—or “the out resurrection”—“...from among from the dead.”

I believe that Paul’s goal should be our goal. It is threefold. This is what I recommend is your goal or your resolution for the new year: Number one, that you want a personal experience with Christ. That’s what Paul wanted. Notice in verse 10, he says, “...that I may know Him.” Paul wanted a personal, intimate experience with Christ.

When you read that statement—“that I may know Him”—you ask the question, “Well, doesn’t Paul already know the Savior? Isn’t Paul already a Christian? Doesn’t Paul already know the Lord?” Some people use the phrase “I know the Lord” for being a Christian. They will ask someone, “Do you know the Lord?” It’s a synonym for “Are you a Christian?”

Paul was saved; he did know the Lord. What he’s actually saying here is, “I want to know Him better. I want to know Him deeper. I want to know Him more intimately and more experientially. I want a deeper, more intimate relationship with Christ.” He didn’t say, “I want to know about Him.”

It’s one thing to read and know about someone, but it’s another thing to know a person. You can read a biography and know all about an individual, but do you really know them intimately and personally? You can know about Jesus Christ, but do you know Him intimately and personally?

Actually, earlier in this same chapter in verses 7-9, Paul had talked about salvation. He used the phrase in verse 9, “Be found in Him.” He said, “I want to be found in Him.” That’s salvation. We are “in Christ.” We are justified. Then beginning in verse 10 down to verse 14, Paul begins to talk about sanctification or Christ living through me or Christ producing His holiness in me.

When you become a Christian, you are justified. Then that starts a lifelong process of sanctification. That’s the work of God setting you apart, making you more holy, making you more like Jesus. The goal of sanctification will not be completely reached until you get to heaven, and that goal is likeness to Jesus. So what God is doing in your life right now as a Christian is that He is working on you; molding you and shaping you to be more like Jesus Christ. That’s what God is doing in your life; trying to cut away the rough edges, so we’re more like Jesus. So Paul said, “I want to know Him personally and intimately.”

The great St. Bernard said,

“We taste Thee, O Thou Living Bread,

And long to feast upon Thee still:

We drink of Thee, the Fountainhead

And thirst our souls from Thee to fill.”

Are you thirsty for God this coming year? Are you hungering for God? Are you pursuing God?

In Psalm 42, the psalmist said, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God.” Jesus said in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they...”—by the way, that “they” there is emphatic; “they” and they only —“...shall be filled.” Blessed or how happy are those who are hungry for God, who thirst for God, who thirst after righteousness, because they, and they alone, will have filled lives. So if you want to have a full life this coming year, hunger for God and seek God. Make it a passion of your life to seek after God. It’s a pursuit we need to come into.

Secondly, Paul wanted a powerful experience with Christ. In verse 10, Paul said, “in the power of His resurrection.” So the first thing he wanted was a personal experience, and the second thing he wanted was a powerful experience. Paul wanted to experience Christ’s resurrection power in his daily, Christian living. The power that raised Christ from the dead is available to you and me to live lives that are free from sin and producing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

When Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus in Ephesians 1:19-20, he said, “...that you might know the exceeding greatness of His power to us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.” So Paul prayed for the Ephesians that they would know the power of God; that same power that raised Christ from the dead and that they could know it in their daily lives as they lived out their Christian experience.

I believe this power comes in two categories: power over sin’s grip and power to produce the Spirit’s fruit. What do we want the power of God in our lives to keep us from? To be free from sin; to be able to live lives of holiness. Now we’ll never be sinless, but the longer we walk with God, we should be sinning less and less and less. That’s the challenge. That’s growing in sanctification. I’ll never be sinless, but I should sin less every year.

I want to become more like Jesus this year. That’s my passion. I want to be free from sin’s grip. And I want the power of the Resurrection to produce fruit.

Paul wanted to die to sin and live unto righteousness. He said this in Galatians 5:16: He said, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” If we walk in the Spirit, if we live in the Spirit, if we rely upon the Spirit, if we know Him more powerfully, if we know Him more

personally, we'll "not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." In Galatians 5:22, it says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering,..."—or "patience"—"...gentleness..."—or "kindness"—"...goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" or "self-control."

Now the fruit of the Spirit is love, and love breaks down into three categories. Notice in the listing of the fruit of the Spirit that there are three triads or three sets of three. First there is love, joy and peace. Those speak of my relationship to God, or when I am rightly related to God in my personal and powerful experience with Christ, there is love and joy and peace. Then there is patience, kindness and goodness. That is how I am toward other people around me. So when I am right with God, I have His love, joy and peace, and I relate to other people with patience and kindness and goodness. Then the third triad is faithfulness, meekness and self-control. That's what I am in myself. So the three triads are number one, my relationship to God; number two, my relationship to others; and number three, who I am in my own person, with faith, meekness and having self-control.

So I want to know Him, I want to know the power of His Resurrection, and the third thing that is Paul's goal—and our goal for this coming year—is a painful experience. In verse 10, he said, "and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." Paul said, "Jesus suffered, so I want to suffer with Him."

This is where we want to check out. "Great sermon, Pastor, until this third point. I like the idea of a personal experience. I like the idea of a powerful experience." We all like power; we're into power. We all like the fruit of the Spirit. But no one likes pain. But Paul wanted to suffer with Christ.

This is a topic that is purely Biblical. It is all through the Scriptures but very rarely preached on or talked about. You don't preach sermons on this, because it doesn't draw big crowds. You don't write books about it, because nobody's going to buy a book on the fellowship of His suffering. "I can't wait to buy that book and read it." But this is what Paul wanted. He wanted to be so close to Jesus that he suffered with Him.

Now what does Paul mean by "the fellowship of His sufferings"? First let me tell you what he doesn't mean. He's not saying that he wants to pay for or atone for his sins. That can't happen. There is nothing we can do to punish ourselves or suffer to merit, earn or deserve the forgiveness of God. Jesus died on the Cross for your sins, and when He cried, "It is finished" or "Tatelestai," it means, "Paid in full." It's done and it's finished.

That's what Christianity is, by the way. Christianity says "Done" or "Paid in full." Other religions say "Do"; Christianity says "Done." We enter in by faith to what is called the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Then we are standing in Him complete.

But Paul also expresses the idea that when I am walking with God and in fellowship with God, living for God, I'm so identified with Him that I suffer for His name sake. In another place, Paul uses the term "crucified with Christ." It's the same concept. Jesus put it like this: "If any man

will come after Me...and take up his cross, and follow Me.” So it’s the suffering that comes in walking in fellowship with Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “If they persecute Me, they will persecute you.” Jesus told His disciples that they shall indeed participate in His suffering. All of the Apostles—save one, John—died a martyr’s death.

Are you a follower of Jesus Christ? His feet were pierced. Are you a follower of Jesus Christ? He was rejected, despised and hated by men. The Bible says, “All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” I believe that Paul is saying, “I want to be so close to Jesus that the world treats me the way they treated Jesus. I want to be so close to Jesus Christ that the world, even though they reject me, identifies me with Jesus.” What a blessed thought that is.

There is something I read this week that really struck me. In all my years of study and preaching, I don’t know that I’ve ever heard this thought, so it really struck me. It’s a hypothesis or a theory, and I don’t usually preach from the “white spaces” or from theories but I think it’s an interesting one. The commentary I was reading said, “Could it be that Paul of Tarsus, in his ‘BC’ days...”—or “before Christ” days—“...who persecuted Christians and had them put to death and consented to the death of Stephen, had a hard time thinking that he could go to heaven and bypass suffering? And that he was afraid to actually meet Stephen?” A little crazy here that he was afraid to meet Stephen in heaven and shake his hand when Paul had consented to Stephen’s death and Paul himself didn’t suffer. Could it be that Paul said, “I persecuted Christians. I killed Christians, so Lord, I want to suffer, as well. I don’t want to get to heaven and see Stephen and say, ‘Sorry I consented to your death, but I escaped death.’”

“Must I be carried to the skies

On flowery beds of ease,

While others fought to win the prize

And sailed through bloody seas?”

The answer is, “No.” Jesus went to the Cross, and if we’re following Jesus, we must die to ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him.

Paul did suffer. Read 2 Corinthians 11:7. It tells all the things that Paul endured. He was naked and hungry, he was shipwrecked three times and was stoned. 2 Corinthians 12 tells of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.” God allowed this painful experience in Paul’s life to keep him humble and dependent.

I believe with all my heart that God loves us so much that many times He allows pain to come into our lives so it will drive us from the path of ease and force us to get on our knees to pray and seek Him and call upon His name.

One of my favorite authors is a man who has long been in heaven. His name is J.C. Ryle. He wrote in 1856 that “If we are true Christians, we must not expect everything smooth in our

journey to heaven. We must count it no strange thing if we have to endure sickness, losses, bereavements and disappointments, just like other people. Free pardon and full forgiveness, grace by the way and glory at the end—all this our Savior has promised to give. But He has never promised that we shall have no afflictions. He loves us too well to promise that. By affliction He teaches us many precious lessons, which without, we should never have learned. By affliction He shows us our emptiness and our weakness, draws us from the throne of grace, purifies our affections, weans us from the world, makes us long for heaven. In the resurrection morning, we shall all say, 'It was good for me that I was afflicted. We will thank God for every storm.'" I love that.

You'll be able to say, "I thank God for the bitter things. They've been a friend to grace. They've driven me from the path of ease to storm the secret place. I thank God for the friends who have failed to fill my heart's deep need. They've driven me to the Savior's feet, upon His love to feed. I'm thankful too that through all life's way that no one could satisfy. So I've found in God alone my full and rich supply."

Is that your testimony? If so, then I pray that this coming year you would seek Him with all of your heart. I want to know Him. I want to know the power of His Resurrection, and, yes, I even want to know "the fellowship of His sufferings."

Notice in verse 11, Paul's expectation: "If, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." That's not conveying Paul's doubt that he'll go to heaven or doubt that he's saved. Paul is speaking in humility. He's saying, "I don't know how it's going to happen. I don't know how I'm going to die. I don't know when I'll get to go to heaven. I don't know when I'll be resurrected. But by any way, shape or means, I want to know that one day I'll be with the Lord." That was Paul's goal; to know Him and to know His power and the fellowship of the suffering.

But now we need to ask: How do we reach that goal? How does Paul/we attain that goal? The answer is in verses 12-14. "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected..."—nobody's perfect—"...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..."—Now if you mark in your Bible, mark the word "forgetting"—"...and reaching..."—that's the second word you want to mark—"...forward to those things which are ahead..."—and here's the third word—"...I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

So here we have Paul speaking of how to reach the goal. There are two things: number one, we need a sanctified dissatisfaction. I like that concept. You ask, "Well, what do you mean by that?" I mean the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts satisfies me, but I want more. He satisfies me, but I want to go deeper. He satisfies me, but I want to know Him fuller, more powerfully in my daily life. This should be our goal in the coming year. It starts with a sanctified dissatisfaction.

I want you to notice Paul's honest admission. He breaks it down. He had not received

everything. In verse 12, he says, “Not that I have already attained.” Then in verse 13: “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended.” So he says, “I haven’t attained” and “I haven’t yet apprehended.” Here Paul is admitting that he has not received everything. The word “attained” means “obtained.” So even after 30 years of walking with Christ, he still wants more. There is still more to attain. There is always a danger of thinking you have arrived.

Have you ever met someone who thinks they are perfect? You say, “Yeah, I live with them.” I’m joking—but I’m not joking. When I preach, I’ll make a statement, and so many times the husband or wife will look at the other and say, “Yeah, he’s talking about you, buster.” They’re looking at each other. Maybe I should have them all stand up, and we’ll pray for you right now. You live with someone who thinks they make no mistakes. They never admit they have any problems. They don’t see their needs. They’re blind, and they think they have arrived. “They’re under the spout where the glory comes out.” They’re living in Canaan land. They think they glow in the dark. Even Paul the Apostle, having walked with God for 30 years, said, “I’m not perfect. I haven’t arrived.”

So if you come to the end of this year and say, “Man, I am awesome! I finally read the whole Bible. I know Greek and Hebrew. I’m so spiritual. I have the fruit of the Spirit just gushing out of my life. Look at me”—wow! The Bible says, “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls.” I don’t want to watch. You’re headed for a fall. You know where your commitment to the new year lies? It first lies with an admission that you need to grow; that there is still room for growth and there is still room for pursuing after God.

Secondly, Paul says he had not become everything, verse 12, when he used the expression “or am already perfected.” He says, “I have not attained...I am not perfect. I have not yet arrived at my goal.” A good athlete always admits that there is room for growth, so he continues to practice. If you are a musician, you practice your instrument. You work hard at your trade so you develop. You haven’t arrived.

Sometimes when we look at others, we can become satisfied. A lot of Christians feel satisfied about their spiritual life, because they look at other Christians who are not as spiritual as they are. But they forget to look at Jesus. That’s the goal. When you look at Jesus, you realize there is room for growth.

Thirdly, in verse 12, Paul had not done everything. He uses the statement, “But I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” Thirty years prior on the road to Damascus, God had saved Paul. His name was Saul then. God called Saul into the ministry. Paul was basically saying, “I’m still pursuing what God has called me to be, what God has called me to do. So he says, number one, “I’ve not received everything”; number two, “I’ve not become everything”; and number three, “I haven’t done everything.”

Are you willing to admit, like Paul, that you’ve not received, become or done everything? Then what do you do? “I follow after,” verse 14. It is a word picture of a hunter pursuing the tracks of its prey—seeking, following, pursuing after.

Number one, I'm not a runner. Number two, I'm not a hunter. I have a son-in-law who hunts, and he took my son duck hunting one day. They got up at 2:00 in the morning, went out and laid in the mud, smeared mud all over their faces, got leaves coming out of their heads for camouflage and they were there waiting to shoot a duck in the freezing cold. I just go buy it at the store. They come home all wasted and I asked them, "Did you get a duck?" "No, we didn't get a duck." I stayed home and slept in a warm bed all morning. I don't understand hunters who will lay in the woods for hours waiting for a deer to walk by. There probably aren't deer for hundreds of miles or something like that. Tramping through the snow trying to get your prey.

But this is the concept: you're putting forth that effort, you're following after, you're pursuing to know Him, to know His power, to know "the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformed to His death." Paul says, "I follow after."

Paul was pursuing God's purpose, verse 12, in apprehending Him. I believe God saved you for a purpose. You need to know what that purpose is, and you need to pursue it. What is God's calling in your life? What is God's purpose for your life?

In Matthew 6:33—a great verse for a new year—it says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." What things? What we eat, what we drink and what we wear. All these material things that you make such a priority in your life; "This year we have to make more money. We have to buy a new house. We have to do this." You're so driven to enlarge your portfolio. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," then God will take care of you. God will provide for you. Then "all these things shall be added unto you."

You must have a sanctified dissatisfaction. Verse 13, "I do not count myself to have apprehended." Don't think you're better than you are. Don't think you're worse than you are. Just have an honest admission of yourself.

Secondly, Paul needed to have a sanctified determination, and so do we. This is the positive; this is how we reach our goal. In verses 13 and 14, it says, "But one thing I do." It is emphatic. We do have a part to play. It's not just "let go and let God." Paul does this: "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 for God in Christ Jesus." That "upward call for God" was the purpose for which God had saved Paul. It was to know Him and make Him known. Notice Paul's honest admission did not lead to discouragement or defeat but to a determination. One thing; "But one thing I do." Pursue the mark, the prize and the high calling, verse 13.

For Paul to reach this goal, he does three things. He said, "but one thing I do," but it required three things. Number one, forgetting the past. In verse 13, he said, "...forgetting those things which are behind." What does Paul mean by the expression "forgetting those things which are behind"? Does he mean we have shock therapy and forget all the bad things that have happened to us? We have to erase them from our memory? We have to blot them out? No. We remember the past. But what he means by this expression is we don't let the past hold us

back or weigh us down.

A lot of Christians are being crucified between two thieves: the regrets of yesterday and the fears of tomorrow. Some of you are crippled right now and don't want to go into the new year because of your fear that your failures that happened in the past will happen again. Or what people have done to you, or how they have treated you or the failures or the financial loss. "I don't want to face the new year. It's not going to be a happy new year." You need to forget that; don't let it influence you or don't let it hold you down. Don't let it weigh you down. We're trying to carry baggage from the past, and it weighs us down. We can't run efficiently.

I think of Joseph being a great example of that. He was such a Christ-like character in the Old Testament, but he was so rejected by his brothers. He was sold as a slave. How would you like to have your family sell you? Imagine being in a group-therapy class. "Joseph, what's your problem?"

"Well, when I was 12 years old, everyone in my family sold me. I became a slave. Then I was lied about and put in a prison and forgotten."

But Joseph always kept his eyes on God. If you ever do a study of the life of Joseph, you'll find out that almost every time in the pages of the Scripture when Joseph speaks, he mentions God. He was so God-centered and God-focused. He always had his focus on God. Years later when he became second to pharaoh and was in charge of all the grain distribution in the land, and his own brothers came and bowed down before him—can you imagine that? You talk about revenge and make my day! "Here they are. I can do whatever I want with them. I've got the power." And what did Joseph say to his brothers? He said, "You meant it for evil, but God intended it for good." He kept his focus on God, and he wouldn't let his past embitter him and hold him back.

I meet people all the time who say, "Pastor John, I can't live the Christian life. I grew up in a dysfunctional family."

I ask, "Who didn't? What family functions perfectly? We all came from dysfunctional families."

I know there are people who had horrible childhoods and horrible upbringings. Tragedies happened in their lives. I understand that. The Bible says we need to forget the past. Don't let it weigh you down. Don't let it hold you back.

We need to be careful even of our past victories. There is a danger in living in the past. The things that you did that were right; the things that you did that were good. You can't run into the future, because you are looking backward. You can't run a race looking backward. Have you ever watched the athletes who run the 100-meter dash? They're on the blocks looking straight ahead. Boom! The gun goes off and they don't look around. They don't wave at the camera halfway through the race. If they do turn around to see who is pursuing them, they lose their stride and lose the race. They have to keep their eyes on the prize. They have to keep running with all they've got. Many times we look around and get discouraged or rest on our glories or

victories, and we can't run the race. So forget what is behind.

The second thing we do is reach, verse 13. Paul says, "...reaching forward to those things which are ahead." We have a new year in front of us. Are you going to run well? Are you going to win the prize? We need to reach. Again, it's a picture of a runner who is agonizing or straining. When they run the race again and get close to the finish line, they reach forward. They lean forward. They strain and give it all they've got to cross that finish line first. It's no time to be letting off. It's no time to be looking away. It's time to be running the race and giving it all we've got.

The great missionary to Africa, David Livingston, was asked, "Where are you going now?"

He said, "I'm ready to go anywhere, provided it's forward."

Are you willing to go anywhere as long as it's forward, in the will of God? As long as it's the Word of God and obedience to God's Word and following the will of God?

Thirdly, Paul says, "I press." I love that. Verse 14, "I press toward the goal for the prize." The mark, the prize, the high calling. "That which God called me for and apprehended for me, I want to attain. I want to know Him better. I want to experience His power and I want to have 'the fellowship of His sufferings.' When I suffer, it drives me closer to Him. The closer I get to Him, the more I suffer for His namesake."

The word "press" describes a vigorous, consecrated pursuit. We must get in the race. The problem is that too many Christians aren't in the race.

Right now is football season. I'm not a big NFL guy. I have to ask somebody else, "Is there a game today? Who's playing? Who's in the playoffs?" I don't know anything about football, but I will watch a little bit of it. I get kind of bored watching it. But isn't it funny that when you're watching a sport, you've become an expert. "Why didn't he catch that? Oh, that's stupid! He dropped the ball!" It's like side-line coaching.

I was one of those dads that when my kids played soccer, I'd freak out. I'd preach on Sunday talking about the fruit of the Spirit, and I'd go crazy at the soccer field on Saturday. My wife used to have to say, "John, people are watching you." That would only make me madder. She would say, "Just go to another field. Watch another game. Sit somewhere else." That's one of the things I have to forget about my past. The players and the kids.

Even today when you watch the NFL, you have all these fans in the stands yelling and screaming. And you have all these players on the field who apparently need rest, and all these fans who desperately need exercise. They're sitting at home eating their wings and pizza and burping and telling the guys how to play. It's like, "Why don't you get down there on the field?" It's crazy.

It also happens in the Christian life. Everyone wants to stand on the sideline and complain.

“Why does he always preach so long? Why is it so cold in the sanctuary?” It’s easy to complain on the sidelines. It’s not so easy to be out on the field; to be the one who is actually running the race. My prayer this year is that we all get out on the field; that we all run the race. Make it your goal and passion to know Him. I want to know the power of his Resurrection. I want to know “the fellowship of His sufferings.”

In Hebrews 12:1-2, it says, “Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us; looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” The weight and the sin, indicating that the weight isn’t something sinful but an encumbrance.

Someone said, “It’s either a wing or a weight.” As you go into this new year, you have weights that you need to let go of. They’re not a wing. They’re not helping you in your walk with the Lord. There are things that have distracted you and pulled you away and consumed your time and your energy. You’re not really seeking God and praying and studying His Word the way you once did. You need to resolve and rededicate and reconsecrate your life to say, “Lord, help me to forget what is behind—my failures, my fears and even my victories. Help me to reach forward and to strain forward for that which is ahead of me. Help me to ‘press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.’”

One of my favorite sections of the New Testament is 2 Timothy 4:6-8. One of the many reasons I love this passage is because in it were the last words that Paul penned before he died. The great Paul the Apostle. He’s in prison and certainly going to be executed for following Jesus Christ. He writes these words: “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.”

Let’s pray.