

Never Give Up; Strive to Win

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of self-discipline and pressing forward in our spiritual walk, forgetting what lies behind and reaching for the goal of becoming like Christ.

Duration: 14:01

Scripture: Philippians 3:13

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Perseverance"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the possibility of spiritual growth and progress even in the midst of challenging circumstances, using examples from 1 Corinthians and Philippians. It encourages believers to strive for the first prize in their spiritual race, highlighting the importance of self-control and discipline. The message also stresses the need to continually press forward in knowing Christ, not being satisfied with past achievements but focusing on areas of growth and helping others along the journey.

Transcript

When we think of spiritual growth, I think of two verses. 1 Corinthians chapter 9 all speaks of the progress in his own life. In verse 24, don't you know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize.

You must run in such a way that you may win. So there are two things I want you to notice here. One is Paul is speaking to one of the worst group of Christians that lived in the first century.

The Corinthian church was the worst church. You know what all they had in their midst? There were people in that church taking each other to court. There were a whole lot of people in the meetings getting up and screaming away in tongues, trying to impress people all fake.

And there was a man living in sexual sin with his stepmother, and nobody was doing anything about it. And when they came for breaking of bread, they would have their potluck. They would bring their lunch with them, and they wouldn't share it with the poor.

Have you ever seen a church like that? I mean, I've seen some bad churches, but not something like this. And he's telling this church, you can come first in the race. Isn't there hope for every one of us then? Are you as bad as what I just said? You're not as bad.

And he said, you can run in such a way that you win the first prize. I mean, you would think that such a church, there's no hope. Forget it.

There's no hope for you fellas. He says, no, there is. Even now, if you repent and turn around and start running, God will forgive your past.

And I want to say that to anybody here who is discouraged or feels condemned, that you are not making it or made some blunder or mistake. You're not as bad as this. Okay, we all made blunders and mistakes, but think of this church.

And this book is kept in the New Testament to encourage us, that you can run in such a way as to win the first prize. But you may say, if there's a church of two, three hundred people, how can they all win the first prize? This is the amazing thing in the Christian life. In the worldly races, one person wins.

That's what it says here. Only one receives the prize. But you, all of you, can run in such a way as to win.

That means you can all come first. It's an illustration. But he says, if you want to do that, you've got to be a little self-controlled or disciplined.

It says in verse 25, everyone who wants this first prize exercises self-control. That means self-control is when self wants to go forward, you put the brakes. Or like when a horse is trying to go off in some other direction, you pull the bridle.

There are some wild horses, before they are caught, who are very fast, very fast. But they will never win a race in a horse race. They'll never win a race in a horse race.

Even though they are very fast. Because they are not disciplined to obey the one who is sitting on top of them, the jockey. And then another horse who is not so fast, wins the first prize.

Because it just obeys the jockey. And the jockey pulls the bridle this side, the horse goes this side. And the jockey kicks the horse with his leg.

The horse runs faster. So, he says you must be disciplined if you want to win the first prize. Discipline in our life is the thing that most Christians need, and which they don't value.

They don't love it enough. They need it, but they don't want to pay the price for it. But he says, as far as he is concerned, Paul himself, Paul is such an amazing man.

He wasn't committing all the sins that these people were doing. And he had done so many wonderful things. But he still says, I run, I discipline my body, verse 27.

I make it my slave. That means I decide what my body is going to do. My eye is not going to decide what it is going to see.

I decide what my eye is going to see. I decide what my hand is going to write. My hand may want to do so many things.

I decide what my tongue is going to speak. That's the meaning of, I make my body my slave. Now, generally speaking, in the world, most people are slaves of their body.

Whatever the body desires, if it's some dirty lust, they go for that. Even in eating and drinking, there can be a very undisciplined way of doing it. I'm not talking about physical health alone.

It's good to be disciplined in the area of physical health. But he's talking about a spiritual thing here. That I discipline my body, not just to keep myself fit, but that I don't look at things which I shouldn't be looking at.

I hold back there. That I shouldn't say things I shouldn't be saying. I hold back there.

That means I pull that horse, that wild horse, and discipline myself. And then I'll win the prize. Otherwise, he says, Paul says, I can be a great apostle.

But I can be disqualified. So that's one thing. The second thing I want to show you is in Philippians 3, where he again speaks about the spiritual progress we heard of, from one stage to another, to another, to another.

Never stopping but continuing, Paul says in Philippians 3, he says, first of all, in verse 8, I count everything in this world as loss, compared to the value of knowing Christ. That is how he comes to saying, I'm pressing towards the mark, verse 12. I haven't attained it yet, verse 13, but I press towards the goal, verse 14.

I forget what lies behind, verse 13, and reach forward to what lies ahead. I see two things there. One, first of all, he's not satisfied with his spiritual growth.

I want to urge all of you, my brothers and sisters, never be satisfied with your spiritual growth. I was born again 58 years ago, but I can say before God today, I'm not satisfied with my spiritual growth. Because I see areas in my life where I'm still not perfectly like Christ.

So I want to be like Christ in those areas also. There are areas where God has helped me to overcome certain things, but if I keep looking back at those things, Oh, I've overcome this, and I've overcome this, and I've overcome this. You know, those who look back in a 100 meters race will never win.

Those who keep looking back even in a marathon race will not win. Paul says, I reach towards the goal. I don't keep looking back saying, How many miles have I covered? I don't keep looking back saying, What all have I overcome? The best way to hinder your spiritual progress is by looking back and congratulating yourself on what all you've accomplished.

Paul says, No, I forget. Verse 13, I forget what lies behind. And I'm reaching forward.

And some of those things you heard today, maybe some of those areas you've already achieved something. Good. Don't look back and congratulate yourself.

Just press on, look at the areas where you've not conquered, and move on. I mean, it's just like in a school. If a child is in the sixth standard, he doesn't keep revising addition and subtraction and glories that in second standard he got 100%, or third standard he got 100%.

He'll never make any progress that way. A good student is actually going ahead of his class and reaching forward and saying, I want to think of the things in mathematics and science I've not yet learned. I want to go ahead.

So that's what Paul says, I press toward the goal. See, in worldly things it's like that. Those of you who are in a profession, whether in the computer field or anywhere else, you know that if you don't keep in touch with the way your profession is advancing, you'll be out of a job after a while.

You can't say, well, I studied computer science in college 10 years ago, and so I'm okay. You're not okay. You'll lose your job if you don't keep in touch with what's happening, because every field of science and jobs, they're progressing.

And so in our profession, we are so eager to keep studying. I mean, I find people who are 40, 50 years old are still studying so that they don't lose their job. And so that must be the passion that we have.

I have not yet become like Christ. What do I study? My study is Christ. What are the areas where I see myself still not like him? I want to press towards that mark.

And I believe, you know, if you see somebody else in this church who is lagging behind, that means you find in some area they have not overcome what you have overcome. What should you do? Do you remember in one conference, I think it was last year or the year before, where Sandeep showed us a video of two brothers who were running a huge marathon race, and some distance, just before they reached the finish, one of those brothers collapsed. Do you remember that? And the other brother, what did he do? He held them, and they were coming first.

They were coming first and second. And there was another fellow coming third. One of those two brothers would definitely have come first.

But he sacrificed his first position to help his brother, and so the other third fellow overtook and came first. He raised his hand and said, yeah, come first. But to me the most wonderful picture there was not the guy who came first.

It was this person who helped his brother and struggled along and struggled along, and when he came to the finishing line, you know what he did? He pushed his brother forward so his brother would come second, and not he himself. Boy, it's a fantastic testimony about true Christianity. And that's what we are supposed to do in a church if you find some person with a weakness or a spiritual handicap or problem or is defeated in some area.

What should you do? Just leave him behind and run ahead and come first? Imagine that worldly person. I don't even think that guy was a Christian. But he said, this is my brother.

I mean, I don't think he would have done it if it was some other person. But this was his brother. And that's how we've got to look at the brothers and sisters in our church.

This is my brother, this is my sister, and they're lagging behind, they're failing somewhere. What shall I do? Let me encourage them. To hold them is to encourage them.

Give a word of encouragement and say, come on, don't give up. Let's press on. Don't give up.

We can still complete the race. Let's be like that and we will be a church that pleases the Lord. Amen.

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