

Philippians 3:10-14

10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11** and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. **12** Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. **13** Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, **14** I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Run the Race

I ran my first 5k race in 2012. My two college friends had somehow, it seems, simultaneously inspired and bamboozled me into agreeing to train and run for a 5k race. I didn't grow up liking running at all. I still have dread-filled and anxiety-ridden memories of having to run *one* mile for the high school gym class final exam. I hadn't grown up a natural athlete and running as a hobby was very foreign to me. Nonetheless, with my friends' prodding, I signed up for my first 5k. They helped me create a training plan, encouraged me along the way, and even signed up to run the 5k with me. Race day came and I was nervous but excited. As people gathered at the start line (you know, long ago in the days when people could gather in large groups), as people gathered around the start line, I had no idea what I was in for, but I decided to put one foot in front of the other and pray to God I wouldn't collapse.

One thing I left out, though. The race I had chosen was a race at the Pittsburgh Zoo. Have any of you been to the Pittsburgh Zoo? The whole zoo is

basically on the side of one of Pittsburgh's infamous mountain-like hills. So the first half of the race was all verrryyy uphill and the second half was all verrryyyy downhill. As soon as I realized what I had gotten myself into I was full of regret. I hadn't trained for this! I trained on flat treadmills and tracks. I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to do what I had set out to do. And as I said earlier, my friends were actual runners - I told them I didn't want to hold them back so as they said one last word of encouragement they zoomed off ahead of me. So it was just me and this race.

Have you ever found yourself in a race you didn't expect to be in? Have you ever been surprised like that and found that what you thought would be reality is suddenly way different or way more difficult than what you had imagined? I think if you're living you'd have to say yes to that question...I mean especially what we've all collectively lived through the last few months. We never expected that we would have to wear facemasks and be ordered to stay at home for weeks on end. We never thought there'd be a day when we are advised to not sing in church or hug our friends. None of us saw this coming, right? And then of course, there are certainly other situations in our own individual, personal lives that are surprise challenges. Life is journey much like a race with surprises around corners, uphill battles, downhill slides.

And in today's scripture from Philippians, the Apostle Paul is likening the journey of life to a race. In the race Paul describes, though, he really highlights

what he calls “the goal” or “the prize” of the race. And really we could think of this goal or prize as the *purpose* of the race - the whole reason for doing it at all. And what is that goal, that prize, that purpose? The first sentence of our scripture, Philippians 3:10 says it: *“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”* If you have your Bible with you and have a pen nearby, underline this verse and write next to it the words “the Christian’s goal.” The word “know” when Paul talks about “knowing” Christ, means to have personal experience with - not just to know about. The word suggests a certain level of familiarity and intimacy. And then if we read further in the sentence, Paul describes a deeper level of familiarity and intimacy with Jesus when Paul speaks of “participating in Christ’s sufferings” that word “participate” is like “to share.” Sharing is more intimate than knowing. And then finally Paul’s next phrase when he says, “becoming like him” suggests the deepest level of familiarity and intimacy. The Greek word for “becoming like him” literally means “to become the same form” or “to conform” in likeness.

Wow, isn’t that cool?! So in this one verse Paul shares with us the process of discipleship, or the goal of a Christian. If you have that pen nearby still, circle in your Bible the words “know,” “participate,” and then the phrase, “becoming like him” to help remember the journey of the disciple. When we continue to get to get to know Jesus, like really truly spend time with him and learn from him, we

begin to participate in the Way of Christ, sharing in his way of life, and as we continue in that way, we begin to be conformed into his likeness - we begin to think and act as Jesus would.

So how do you and I continue to get to *know* Christ so well that we end up being like him, thinking and acting as he would? Well, if we think about it like a race, each step - left, right, left, right, left, right - is what gets us closer to that finish line, that goal. There's no other way to get to the finish line but to take every step it takes to get there. That might sound silly or simplistic, but it's the repeated, ordinary steps, added up over time to get us to our goal. And so, in life, it's also the ordinary, everyday things that we do (our habits, rhythms, and rituals we do every day) that keep us running in the direction our Christian goal being like Jesus.

There's a way of prayer that is such a helpful way of creating this habit of keeping our eyes on Jesus in our daily life. This way of prayer is called "The Daily Examine" and is meant to be prayed every day or even multiple times a day. It's a way of prayer that prays through 5 steps and can last a few minutes or up to 20 minutes - it's up to you and how quickly or how long you and God move through the 5 steps. I'm going to share those 5 steps with you now. Feel free to jot them down and even memorize them in the coming days so you can easily go through the steps at any point. I'll be sending out a link to you this week that

leads to a website where I found these 5 steps of prayer called the Daily Examine. Here's the 5 steps:

1. Be Still – *become aware of the presence of God.*

Become aware of the presence of God, with you and in you.

“Be still and know that I am God.”

Use a breath prayer (Richard Foster, Eastern Orthodox tradition), if it helps you, praying as you breathe in, “You are here, Lord” and as you breathe out, “And I am with You.”

2. Give Thanks – *review the past hours with thankfulness.*

This is a time to look upon the day with gratitude - the good parts and bad parts. Maybe someone made you laugh, or you tasted really good food, or you saw an answer to prayer - be thankful for those moments. Both big and small.

For the moments that were painful or difficult in your day, try to reframe them by saying “Thank you God for that situation that gives me a good opportunity to trust in you.”

3. Reflect – *become aware of your emotions.*

Pastor Dan Wilt explains this step by saying: Ask, “How am I coming to this moment?” Name the emotion you are feeling, or the various ones you felt over the past hours. Then, give each one to the Lord. Invite Him into those emotions, and welcome Him to turn them toward His ends. You can also ask yourself here,

“Did I choose Jesus’ way in that situation?” If you did choose Jesus’ way in a situation, rejoice. If not, examine your heart for sin, and choose to make amends.

4. Pray – *choose one feature of the day so far, and pray.*

Then turn your heart to choose one joy, or sorrow, or area to pray about. Give it to the Lord completely. This is a chance to really choose to trust God with something specific.

5. Hope – *look toward the next hours (or day) with expectation.*

Tell the Lord that you hope in Him for the next hours ahead. See the next tasks with expectation that God will be good, that you will notice His work in the situation, and that His will – will be done. Pray “Let Your Kingdom come, let Your will be done.” End your prayer with trust. Reorient yourself to trusting in God.

(By Dan Wilt - danwilt.com)

Those 5 steps of prayer are such a great way of reflecting on our days (our thoughts and actions) to find where we can become more like Christ and walk in the way that leads to life. I wonder what would happen if we went through these 5 steps of prayer every day before we went to bed. If we walked through these 5 steps of prayer every day, for one week, one month, one year, I wonder how much we’d become like Jesus.

Have you ever heard the cliché, “It’s a marathon, not a sprint.” The phrase is usually said to describe things that take a lot of time to build or finish. And

although clichés like “It’s a marathon, not a sprint” are sometimes over-used phrases and end up losing their meaning, oftentimes, clichés are clichés because of the nugget of wisdom those short and simple phrases hold. If we think of our own Christian lives as a marathon, not a sprint, it really is the everyday steps, ordinary habits, rhythms and rituals, we do that get us closer to our goal of being more like Jesus.

While I was running that 5k at the Pittsburgh Zoo, it was more difficult than I had thought it would be. Actually when I finally did finish that race, my friends were waiting for me at the finish line and let me know that with all the many 5k races they had run before, that was by far the hardest they had run. Hah! Maybe they said that just to encourage me or maybe it was true. All I know is that I did get to that particular goal - only by taking each individual difficult step.

Let’s pray --

Heavenly Father, thank you for your Son Jesus who not only gave his life that we might live, but who also is the model who we look to in order to know how to run this race called life. Holy Spirit, we ask you to help us create habits in our lives that bring us closer to looking like Jesus. Lord, we pray the words Paul said long ago: “Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, we press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Through the power of the Your Spirit, enable us to press on. Amen.