

SUCCEEDING IN LIFE
How to Enjoy the Rest of Your Life - Part 8 of 12
Philippians 3:12-21
Rick Warren

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-21

"Join with others in following my example, and take not of those who live according to the pattern we gave you." vs. 17

Paul's Pattern For Successful Living

1. EVALUATION: _____

"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect ... I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it." vs. 12-13

"I don't claim that I have already succeeded or become perfect." (GN)

"You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up; then God will show mercy to you." Prov. 28:13 (GN)

Question:

II. ELIMINATION: _____

"But this one thing I do; forgetting what is behind ... " v. 13b

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing!" (says the Lord) Isa. 43:18

What to Forget:

"Jesus said, `Anyone who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for the Kingdom of God.'" Luke 9:62 (GN)

Question:

III. CONCENTRATION: _____

"But this ONE THING I do ... straining toward what is ahead I press on toward the goal ... "
vs. 13c

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to win the prize." I Cor. 9:24

What is "The Goal"?

"So we make our goal to please Him ... " 2 Cor. 5:9

Question:

IV. DETERMINATION: _____

"... I press on ... straining ... I press on to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

"But I reckon my own life to be worth nothing to me, in order that I may complete my mission and finish the work that the Lord Jesus gave me to do, which is to declare the Good News of the grace of God." Acts 20:24

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord ... will award to me on that day ..."
2 Tim. 4:7-8

3 Suggestions: vs. 15-16

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In Philippians 3 Paul writes about succeeding in life. There is a market glut today of books on success. Everyone thinks the latest book will be the one to make their life fulfilling and solve all my problems. The ironic thing to me that many books on success are written by people who have no track record. They have no real experience in the world. They just wrote a book!

When I want to learn about success, I want somebody who's done it. I want to look at somebody who has accomplished what I want to accomplish. We learn much more about success -- life -- from models than we do from manuals.

So who is our model? The Lord Jesus Christ is, of course. But next to Him, the most successful Christian who ever lived would have to be Paul. He was an incredible man. He lived life to the fullest. He made his life count.

In Philippians 3 we have Paul's autobiography. In the first eleven verses he deals with his past. In today's passage he deals with his present and his future. From it we can see the model for successful living. Paul even encourages us to follow his example. V. 17 "Join with others in following my example, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you." What is his pattern? In this passage he briefly explains four keys to successful living.

Paul's Pattern for Successful Living

1. EVALUATION: Face my faults.

This is where you admit you don't have it all together, that you still have a long way to grow, that you haven't arrived, that you're not perfect. You do an inventory of your life. You've got to know where you are before you know where you want to go. You start by looking at where are the areas that need improvement.

Paul himself was honest about his faults. V. 12-13 "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect. I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it." In the Good News translation: "I don't claim that I have already succeeded or become perfect."

To me, that's an amazing statement, because Paul is an old man now. If anybody had the right to claim he had arrived it would be Paul. He wrote most of the New Testament. He single handedly spread Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. He made an incredible impact on the world. Yet Paul, at the end of his life, says "I don't have it all together. I haven't arrived. I'm not perfect. I'm still growing." The point is, successful people never stop growing. They are always developing, growing, expanding, learning. Even when he gets to be an old man, in prison, he says, "I haven't arrived."

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That is so contrary to people today. Many Christians will give you the impression that they never have any problems. They give you the impression that they have arrived. They are sinless perfection, no problems or doubts! I get indigestion from those kinds of people. The longer I grow as a Christian the more acutely aware that I am of my own inadequacies, limitations, weaknesses and faults. Rather than saying "Look how far I've come," I have to say, "Look how far I have to go!" Paul says this is the starting point for successful living -- to face your faults, be honest, do an evaluation.

Proverbs 28:13 in the Good News: "You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up; then God will show mercy to you." Successful people are honest about their faults. Transparency is a mark of emotional maturity. Successful people admit that they have not arrived, that they have a long way to go. A lot of people are afraid to admit their weaknesses because they are more interested in having a reputation than they are in being successful. Sometimes you have to choose between the two -- Do I want to look good? Or do I want to be good?

The question you ought to ask yourself is, "Where do I need to change?" Take a personal inventory. We're good at inventorying other people and see where they need to change.

2. ELIMINATION: Forget the former; let go of your past.

Stop being manipulated by your memories. v. 13 "This one thing I do, forgetting what is behind." Paul says if he is going to be all God wants him to be he's not going to waste any more time on yesterday. It's gone. It's past. My past is past. I let go of my guilt, grief, grudges. I let go of the past so I can get on with the present. Success involves learning to forget.

Isaiah 43:18 "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing!" How do you forget? Isn't it true our brain stores everything you have ever done? Isn't it true that we never really forget anything? So how do I forget the former?

To forget, actually means, don't let the past affect you anymore. Don't let it control you or have power over you or manipulate you. Successful people learn from the past without dwelling on the past. There's a big difference. Successful people learn from the past and once they learn, they let it go and move on. They don't keep hounding themselves about the past.

It's human nature we tend to remember things we should forget and we tend to forget things we should remember. We hold on to the cruddy, garbage memories we should let go of and we tend to forget the things we should remember, the lessons we learned through it all.

Two things you need to forget if you are going to follow Paul's pattern:

- 1) Your failures. So many Christians are continuing to rehearse things in their heart that God has long since forgiven and forgotten. They won't forgive themselves. They're holding on to the past. Satan's favorite desire is to paralyze us with the past, to manipulate us with the memories.

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Paul says "I learn to forget the past." He doesn't set around beating himself, filling himself with self-condemnation for mistakes. Everybody here has blown it. We have things in our past that we regret. Paul, of all people, probably had many regrets that could have haunted him. The Bible says in his B.C. days he was a persecutor of the church. He hounded people who were believers. He held the coats of the men who stoned Steven, the first martyr and probably enjoyed it. Paul faced his faults and forgot the former so he could get on with life.

Nothing you ever do will change your past. No tears, regrets, self-pity. The past is past, over, dead. You can't do anything about it. Let it go. Learn from it and let it go.

2) Your successes. Learn from them but let go of them. It's so easy to rest on your laurels, to live in the past, to base your security on past performance, to think, "I've got it made!" "The good old days" are done with. Let it go.

The problem with success is that it tends to make you complacent and fills you with pride. Then you stop growing and learning and then you're going to fail.

Luke 9:62 (Good News) "Jesus said, `Anyone who starts to plow and then keeps looking back is of no use for the Kingdom of God.'" You can't drive a car looking in the rear view mirror. You can't run a race looking backwards. You've got to let it go.

The Question becomes: What memory do I need to let go of?

III. CONCENTRATION: Focus on the future.

If all you do is forget the past, you may just have amnesia. That doesn't make you successful. Successful people are goal oriented. They focus on the future.

V. 13 "But this one thing I do ... straining toward what is ahead I press on toward the goal." Successful people are goal oriented. Paul has a single priority: In Greek this is the word "one" with an exclamation point -- "ONE!" He's talking about concentration.

The most common disease in the Saddleback valley is Fragmentosis -- trying to do 100 different things at the same time. Jack of all trades; master of none. Most people are spread out too thin.

Paul says, find out what counts. He's talking about the power of concentration. If a river spills over its banks you have a marsh, a swamp. But if that river is confined between certain banks, dam it up, channel it and it is a tremendous source of power. Light diffused is powerless, weak. If you take power and light and concentrate it you have a laser. It is powerful. That is the power of concentration. Life focusing on one thing.

If you want to be a professional, there is a secret -- concentration. Pros concentrate on one thing. They specialize. You can't know everything, be everything, do everything.

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Paul says "I face my faults, forget the former and focus on the future and that is the one thing I do. I have my goal clearly in mind."

Less than 5% of the people in America ever write down a life goal. It is not by accident that the 5% that do are the top leaders in their field. Write it down and focus on specific goals.

I Cor. 9:24 "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to win the prize." There is a certain way of running, the way professionals run.

What was Paul's goal? 2 Cor. 5:9 "So we make our goal to please Him." There is no more rewarding goal in life than to please God. Paul wanted to be able to stand at the end of his life and hear Jesus say, "Well done thou good and faithful servant. You were faithful in a few things. Come into my joy."

The question we ask ourselves is, What am I living for? What is my goal in life? What's most important? If you don't know where you're going, nobody else does. Focus on the future.

IV. DETERMINATION: Fight to the finish. Persistence.

The principle of determination: Absolutely nothing worthwhile in life happens without effort. The only way you coast is when you're going downhill. If you're coasting in life right now you're headed downhill. Paul said, "I fight to the finish."

The great people in life are just ordinary people with extraordinary amount of determination. They don't know how to quit. They keep on keeping on. They never give up.

Notice the terms Paul uses in v. 12 & 13: "I press on, straining toward the mark... I press on to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Feel the intensity of Paul here, the determination. "Press on" in the Greek literally means "I over extend myself. -- I go for it with all I've got. I throw myself into it, straining with every nerve and ounce and muscle to reach the prize." He's a man of intensity, maximum effort. No gain without pain. That's the way to live!

What would happen if Christians would put as much energy into growing as they do into making money or their favorite sport?

Acts 20:24 "But I reckon my own life to be worth nothing to me, in order that I may complete my mission and finish the work that the Lord Jesus gave me to do, which is to declare the Good News of the grace of God." This is Paul's life verse. Paul said he's not going to stop, to give up, quit. He's going to keep on keeping on until he's experienced all that God had for him in life. He wanted to finish the purpose for which God made him. He saved you and me for a purpose. Paul said he was going to finish what he started.

I hate the word "quit". It sounds like such a losing word. I don't like the word "impossible" either. God says all things are possible. Yet the world is full of quitters, people who cop out at

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the drop of a hat. They give up on their business, their marriage, their kids, relationships, dreams. Paul said "I am not going to quit. No matter what happens, I'll never give up." I want God's best for my life and I'm going to complete what He's called me to do.

The last words of Paul are in the last book that he wrote.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord ... will award to me on that day ..." More than anything else I want to be able to say this about my life when I die. I finished the race and fought the good fight and kept the faith and as a result there is a crown laid up for me in heaven. Paul's not talking about salvation here -- that's a free gift. He's talking about rewards. He's running for rewards. There's the crown that's going to last on that side. I'm going to spend longer on that side of eternity than this side. Paul wanted to be a winner in life, not the winner of the world, but the winning that counts.

Paul summarizes this by giving three suggestions in v. 15-16 on how to be persistent. How do you keep on keeping on when things get discouraging?

1) v. 15. "All of us who are mature should take such a view of things." You're going to face your faults, focus on the future, forget the former, and fight to the finish. All of us who are mature will act this way. He's saying here, don't become complacent, don't become satisfied.

2) Be teachable. "And if on some point you think differently that too God will make clear to you." Stay open, God will teach you. The moment you stop being teachable, you stop learning. The moment you stop learning, you stop growing. The moment you stop growing, you're dead.

3) Be persistent. "Let us live up to what we have already attained".

Two Promises:

Galatians 6:9 "Let us not grow weary in doing good. For at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Don't give up. Don't give up on your marriage, your dream... You will reap a harvest at the proper time if you do not give up.

Philippians 1:6 "Be confident of this very thing. That He [God] who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion unto the day of Christ Jesus." What God starts, He finishes. He doesn't lead you out on a limb and cut you off. You do your part and God will do His part. You do your best and He'll do the rest.

Which of these issues do you need to focus on?

When was the last time you sat down and did a frank, personal evaluation of your life? Your marriage, your career, your finances, your relationship to God, your relationship to your kids. Everybody has things they don't like about themselves. But you can't grow as long as you keep it locked in a closet. Let the fear, regret, worry out into the open. The healthiest thing you can do is do a frank evaluation of your life and to admit it and let it come out.

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Are you continuing to allow the past to control your present? Are you allowing a past memory continue to hurt you now? Your past cannot hurt you unless you let it. Learn from it and let it go.

Are you trying to dabble in so many things that you can't get anything done? Maybe you need to cut something out of your life so you'll have time for the important things. Focus on what counts. Say "This one thing I do."

Or maybe you've been tempted to give up.

These are key values in life. The things we're looking at this morning are foundations of this church. They determine the kind of church we are. This is a church for imperfect people. Like Paul, we say, none of us have arrived. If you're perfect you're not welcome here. We don't need you. We don't need perfect people in this church. These are people who are on the way, people who are growing, people who admit they don't have it all together.

This is a church where we don't care about your past. I'm interested in what direction are you headed right now. That's what matters. Not yesterday but today. If God only used perfect people nothing would get done. It matters where you're headed now. What counts now? What's the direction now?

This is a church that focuses on the future. We have a goal, a mission, to take the good news of Jesus Christ to everybody within this ministry area. As long as there is one person who doesn't know Christ we will continue to focus on that goal.

This is a church where we do not quit. We do not quit on people and we do not quit on things we know to be the will of God.

You need a power outside of yourself to let go of the past and to be able to focus on the future and to have the power to keep going, to keep on keeping on to do the things you know to be right. That comes in a relationship with Christ.