

## **We're Not Done Yet!** **Philippians 3:14**

**September 13 & 14, 2014**  
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We are going to talk about the church today. Why is it sacred? We just had communion together, a sacred reminder of what Jesus did. For who? The church. Jesus died to save his church, which we are a part of by faith in Jesus. Many people see Jesus' cross as a death for them individually. While true in some respect, it's more accurate to say Jesus died for his church which every individual Christian is privileged to be a part of. Jesus is coming back for the church. Jesus loves the church and gave his life for her (Ephesians 5:25). The universal church finds its local expression in gathered communities of believers. Our summer series in Revelation revealed that Christ has tender love for each of our local churches as well. So what is the connection between Christ's love for the local church and Paul's passionate plea in Philippians 4 for each of us to live vigorously for Christ like a runner straining for the finish line?

Let's do a quick review. Last week we looked at Philippians 4:12ff, the highlight of which is the Apostle Paul describing how he looks at his own life, like a runner in a race. *"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead..."* (Philippians 3:13)

Running is a compelling word picture. We've all watched world class athletes compete in the Olympics or other event. Why do we tune in? Seeing a fellow human apply such determination and skill and effort is worth watching. In most events, what do they do? They leave where they were and run or jump or skate or ski toward what lies ahead. The finish line. A reward. A medal. An honor. A victory. That prize drives them forward.

As Christians, our ultimate prize is of a different kind. It's not a gold medal or a big payday; rather, it is far better. The prize of our life is Christ himself. Paul says that, *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 3:14)

If there was ever a Christian who might think he had earned the right to take it easy, it was Paul. Yet he says, I'm pressing forward for Jesus with everything I have. Wouldn't a vision of Christ or successful church planting or miracles or composing inspired Scripture qualify someone to say, *"Good enough. I'll just stop right here."* For Paul, it was the opposite; it motivated him to more and more quality service and sacrifice for Christ.

We are talking about this because of where we are as a church and specifically this Crown Point campus. We have recently started three new campuses across Northwest Indiana. Today, we had the grand opening in Gary. These are exciting days for us with newspaper articles every other week announcing something. Soft Launches. Groundbreakings. Grand Openings. I wonder if we see the dangerous place we are in? As Scripture says, *"Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."* (1 Corinthians 10:12) Let the church that thinks they stand, take heed lest they fall.

This is our challenge. Might the good things God has done plant seeds of pride which will be our undoing? Ever notice how hard it is for professional sports teams to repeat a championship? Why? There is something in a win that is the first step downward. Are we done? Have we arrived? Have we reached as many as we will reach with the gospel? We are

addressing this for two reasons; lest any complacency creep its way in and to recognize that what we have done creates many needs and opportunities for us right here in CP. Philippians is a letter that has a lot to say about that. So we are going to scan the whole letter and then talk about some practical ministry opportunities we have to match your passion for Jesus with real ministry to his church.

### **How NOT to Run**

### **How to Run**

*"Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you."* (Philippians 3:15)

### **Immaturity**



### **Maturity**

A sign of spiritual maturity is someone whose perspective on life is living it fully for God and his kingdom. He calls it, "pressing on." Maturity continues to press forward. Immaturity does not. We obviously want to grow and be mature but this will require further effort, in some ways, more than ever. Which is harder in a race, the first laps or the later laps? It is easy for churches to start and live on the initial momentum. But to continue to push forward in the middle and last laps requires spiritual fortitude and determination—qualities found in the mature.

The responsibility of the church is to bring the immature to maturity. This is called discipleship. How do we do that? We provide contexts for spiritual growth. Small groups aren't just another program; they bring God's people to maturity. Our teaching ministries from the pulpit, Bible studies, classes, and even the Bookstore bring us to maturity. Ministry opportunities of service provide a context for using spiritual gifts to bring people to maturity. Community compassion ministries that we are involved in connect God's people with those in pain and need. Even financial giving is both an indicator and a mechanism for spiritual growth and maturity.

All of these and more are the lifeblood for our church as we seek to bring people to Christ and then grow them into fully mature followers of Jesus.

### **Self-ambition**



### **Gospel Ambition**

*"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice."* (Philippians 1:15-18)

Paul was an apostle; the risen Christ appeared to him personally and commissioned him to this. You would think this put him above the petty rivalries and jealousies in ministry. Not at all. He writes this letter from prison. He relates here that his imprisonment has inspired some to preach Christ boldly. Great.

But there was another group. This other group resented Paul's influence and popularity. They chafed at his authority. Why? They wanted it. So with Paul stuck in prison, this was their chance to strut their stuff. Draw people's admiration. Draw people to their bandwagon. They preached Christ, but did so with innuendo about Paul. A little sniping. A little snarky. They were ambitious but it was self-ambition. Paul's response shows what gospel ambition looks like. *What does it matter? As long as Christ is preached.* Here we see the selflessness of the apostle. The same selflessness as John the Baptist who, when the crowds left him to

follow Jesus, famously uttered, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30) When our ambition is Jesus and the gospel, we can rejoice whenever those are accomplished; even when it's someone else's ministry, even when that person's motives are questionable. Who are we promoting, after all? Ourselves or a crucified Savior?

- "For I have no one like [Timothy], who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 2:20-21)
- "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)

These verses get at the issue. Ambition is not the problem. We should be ambitious in gospel ministry. We should take risks for Christ. We should ambitiously serve in the church and the community. Ambition is the not the problem. *Self-ambition* is. Who are we being ambitious for? Pride easily masks itself as spiritual hustle and bustle. *Look what I am doing! I must be a spiritual giant.* This is slippery and hard to determine because it gets right down to the heart level. Why do I do what I do? Is it for me? Who am I trying to make look great? To ask our church, are we simply trying to make a name for ourselves or be big-shots in Northwest Indiana? That is selfish ambition and pride. Gospel ambition might look the same on the outside but it has an entirely different ambition on the inside.

- "A good ambition becomes a selfish ambition when it's our only ambition." (Dave Harvey, *Rescuing Ambition*, p. 75.)
- "Ambition which centers on the glory of God and the welfare of the church is a mighty force for good." (J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, p. 2)

Here are great indicators of gospel ambition. *Will I serve in obscure positions? Am I willing to serve categories of people who don't advance my name-building? Is my giving of money or time dependent on acknowledgment? How do I react when ministry requirements are inconvenient?* These and many others reveal the true motives behind my service.

Here is a great check for us as a church: do we pray for other churches in the community? Do we do so sincerely? I call us to more of it.

### **Prayerlessness <-----> Prayer in Everything**

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

How many Christians stumble because they are running without prayer? Prayer connects us to the life of God. Prayer connects us to the wisdom of God. Prayer connects us to the will of God. Prayer is our lungs which breathe into us spiritual strength from God. Christians have to pray like runners have to breathe. Guess what happens when runners can't breathe? They stop. That's it.

How important is prayer to the life of a Christian or a church? Absolutely critical. Paul says, rather than be anxious, pray in everything! His spectrum is anxiety on one side and prayer on the other. Apparently anxiety and prayerlessness go hand in hand. If you are struggling with fear today, might one cause be prayerlessness in your life?

In a meeting before the merger, one of the leaders at Central Baptist asked, "What makes you think you will be effective in Hobart and Portage when we have struggled all these years?" I replied, "We are going to fall on our faces in prayer and ask God to do something."

It would be the height of hubris to think that showing up in Gary or Portage means automatic success. For any of these multisites to succeed, God must empower them. Prayer frees God to empower our efforts for him because it shows God we don't think we can do it on our own.

If what's needed at the Hobart/Portage campus is prayer, what's needed at the Crown Point campus?

With the recent hire of Terry Zeitlow as Executive Pastor, it gets me out of some of the day-to-day things and look at the big picture. And when I look at the big picture, I don't think we pray enough. I'm looking at some new ways to engage our campus and our whole church in prayer. We will share more later, but I recently wrote a report to the Elders that expressed my concern that we need to pray more and for prayer to be a larger part of the life of our church.

### **Joylessness** <-----> **Rejoicing**

*"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."* (Philippians 4:4) Sometimes when I am struggling in ministry, I'll think about Psalm 100:2, *"Serve the LORD with gladness!"* (Psalm 100:2) Serving our great, holy, saving, loving, merciful, faithful God with a glad and willing heart is only appropriate, isn't it?

Where does joyful service of God come from? Let's go back to the summary from Philippians. Clearly it doesn't come from circumstances or the guy writing it from prison would never write such a thing. But what does he say? *"Rejoice **in** the Lord."* There is much in this life to NOT rejoice in. We shouldn't rejoice in evil or sin or its ruinous effects around us. I don't have to rejoice in a pain itself. What I am to do is rejoice in all things because of how God uses all of them for good and glory. I can count it all joy when I fall into a trial because of how that trial strengthens my faith. So no matter what my circumstance, I can always rejoice in Jesus. The joy of the Lord is my strength when the source of my joy is in him (Nehemiah 8:10).

In our church, we are in some pleasant circumstances. Exciting days. Let's enjoy it, but remember that it won't always be like this. We have gone through hard times. We will go through hard times again. Why do we keep running? Why keep trying new things, venturing into new opportunities, stretching ourselves out of our comfort zones? Because our joy is IN the Lord and for his sake, all these efforts are worth it.

Let me share one example with you. Some time ago, a young woman and her husband started coming to our church. This was a big step for them. She recently posted on Facebook what the ministry here at Bethel has meant. I'm going to read a few portions.

*"We've found a wonderful place at Bethel Church...More than just a church, we've found a beautiful Christ-centered, grace-filled, biblically-modeled congregation where we are growing and really thriving spiritually. Jesus has become real in our lives, we see life through a new lens, and the Christian fellowship has refreshed us. When we came to Bethel, we were dry, stagnant, and thirsty. We found a Christian love and life view that really overwhelmed us and drew us to Jesus."*

*The descriptions we had heard of what a church like Bethel would be are so different from what it actually is. Jesus is lifted up. Sins are condemned. Sinners are loved. Christians fellowship, encourage, admonish, and edify. Our Savior is worshiped. The gospel is spread. Doctrines are taught. It's not a come-as-you-are-leave-as-you-were place. It's not a do-nothing-for-God-but-feel-good-because-you-go-to-church place. It's not a sin-as-much-as-you-want-and-call-it-grace place. It's a beautiful place of grace, love, Christ-focus, fellowship, and worship that we can belong to with other believers."*

Isn't that great? So encouraging! How did this happen? God's people ministered to them. Their Sunday experience and first impressions were great. But beyond that, God's people reached out to them, worked to help them, and cared for them. Lo and behold, they think this church is pretty great. Guess what? Now they are serving here. You may have walked by them on the way in today.

Here's another example of this. Ten days after we merged with Central Baptist Church we had the big rain. The big rain hit the Hobart area and sent water right through one of the doors of the building, right down the hallway messing up all kinds of rooms along the way and down into the gymnasium. It was all under water and we had a company come pump the water out and they tell us "you have to get that gym floor out."

So we sent out a note to members of our Hobart/Portage launch team as well as people from Central to ask for help in ripping out the floor. One of the deacons and I arrived in the pastoral fashion, 15 minutes late. Below are pictures of what I saw when we walked in. There were about 60-70 people there sweatin' and workin' and pullin' and tuggin' and by the time we arrived it was almost done. The people showed up and they were eager to work and they were excited to serve. It was so good to see people from these two congregations working together and building relationships. We had that whole thing done in 20 minutes! We ended up giving a tour of the building and finished in the Auditorium where we had an impromptu prayer service. It was really great to see what God's people do when they serve the Lord with gladness.



We want lots more stories like this. For that to happen here, we need everyone running here. Everyone serving. We want to raise this campus up once again in ministry.

See the "Serve" tab on our website ([www.bethelweb.org](http://www.bethelweb.org)) to find opportunities to serve at Bethel.

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