



The Southeast Sower

Southeast Church of Christ

Volume 28 Issue 4

April 2013

“Pressing Toward The Mark”

By Jeff Haught

Successful athletes are often characterized by specific qualities that directly contribute to the level of their success. They tend to exhibit a strong desire, commitment, preparedness, dedication, and discipline in striving to reach the mark they have set for themselves, and be rewarded. Although many athletes may serve as negative examples, there are many positive characteristics of athletes and positive aspects of athletic competitions that are applicable to Christians today as we run our spiritual race. The apostle Paul used the imagery of athletic competition in writing to the Phillipian brethren in Phil. 3:14, *“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”* We as Christians must also practice certain principles and incorporate them into our daily lives with the same drive and determination as a competitive athlete in order to reach our mark and obtain our prize - heaven! Here are a few qualities and principles that we can follow as we “press toward the mark”.

I. Sacrifice

Whatever our role or work in life there is no success without sacrifice. Likewise, there is no successfully “pressing toward the mark” in Christ without sacrifice as well. Sacrifice is self-denial in pursuit of a higher calling. *“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”*, (Phil. 3:7-9).

The advantages, the stature, the importance of the apostle Paul’s previous life as a Jew were of no value in his new life serving Christ. He counted all these things as refuse to be discarded. They were things that could only weigh him down in reaching forward toward his goal.

Following Christ means no longer serving self and serving sin. *“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”*, (Gal. 5:24-25).

The Southeast

Church of Christ meets at:

35 Walnut Court

Mogadore, OH 44260

Phone: 330.628.7432

SERVICES:

Sunday

Bible Study: 10:00 am

Worship: 10:50 am

6:00 pm

Wednesday

Bible Study: 7:30 pm

Visit our website at :

www.southeastchurchofchrist.org

Jesus tells us in Mark 8:34 that *“Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.”* We are commanded to take up the cross of discipleship. Sacrifice involves living in subjection to the will of Christ even as Christ was in subjection to the will of God the Father. It is not merely a suggestion, but a necessity if we are going to run the race in such a way to obtain the prize.

II. Persistence

There is no success without persistence. The story is told of a man hitting a large stone with a sledgehammer. Each time he would swing the hammer he would count, "1...2...3...", and so on. Finally, he reached "98...99...100", and the stone broke into pieces on the 100th swing. But was it the 100th swing alone that broke the stone....or the 99 swings that preceded it?

The point is that putting forth a continual, consistent, well-disciplined effort in the face of challenges pays off in the long run. We are going to face hardships and setbacks. We are going to get knocked down from time to time. There are times in life we feel like we're on the top, other times we feel like we're on the bottom, and sooner or later we're going to feel like we're both places again. It is through these highs and lows that we must resolve to persist. "*Watch, stand fast, quit you (act or compose yourself) like men, be strong.*" (I Cor. 16:13).

Persistence is necessary for our spiritual growth, and can renew our strength if we keep our eyes on the prize and press toward the mark.

III. Accountability

There is no success without personal accountability. In other words, we must get rid of the excuses. An excuse is simply an *invalid* reason for neglecting one's duty or responsibility.

Remember the many excuses Moses made to God when he was called to service in Exodus 3 & 4. Paraphrasing, he said, "Who am I that I should go? Who will I say sent me? They won't listen or believe! I am not an eloquent speaker! Can't someone speak for me?" But God answered every one of his excuses.

Contrast the attitude of Moses with the sentiment expressed in Isa. 6:8 when God's call for service went out. "*Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then said I, 'Here am I; send me!'"* When we have opportunities to serve the Lord, regardless of the capacity, we need to be able to accept the challenge and set our minds to do it without making excuses. When we make excuses we artificially place limitations on the talents and abilities that God has blessed us with.

We must also give our best effort in all that we do. We must not make excuses for our own lack of effort simply because others may not be giving their best effort. We should remember that we will be judged on the use of our individual talent, work and ability (Luke 14:16-24).

If each one of the individual members of the body of Christ, (the church), would give their best effort in supplying what they can to the body, then the entire body would be more fitly joined together in fellowship and be better able to successfully

accomplish the work of the church.

We must get rid of the excuses or they will keep us from reaching our mark, obtaining our prize, and cost us our soul.

IV. Keep Our Eyes On The Prize

There can be no success in "pressing toward the mark" if we lose sight of not only the mark we are striving for but also the prize we are hoping to receive.

What exactly is the mark we are pressing for? What is the prize we hope to obtain that we must keep our eyes set on? Revelation 2:10 gives us the mark and the prize, both in the same verse. "*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.*"

In order to reach our mark (being faithful unto death), we must keep our eyes on the prize - a crown of life! Like a track athlete striving for the finish line, we must run keeping our head facing forward, with no wasted motion from any part of our body. We must run with purpose. We must stay within the boundaries of the course, lest we be disqualified. We must keep our eyes on the prize beyond the finish line, beyond this life, reaching, even leaning for the tape in a final, singular effort as we cross to our reward. We must "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ." Many will fail as they take their eyes off the prize. Will you?