

## No Matter What: Finish

### Philippians 3:12-16

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Runners do weird things. I can say that because I'm a runner. Now, to be honest, because of an injury that took me off the road and I've traded my running shoes for workouts in the gym, somewhere way down deep I'll always be a runner. So, I know that runners do weird things. In fact, the list of weird, sometimes bordering on gross things runners do is as marathonic.

Runners wake up in the middle of the night to get their run in before work, or before going to the airport for a morning flight. Guys have been known to shave their legs before a race... to be more aerodynamic. Some runners blow their noses while running, without a tissue. There are runners who will talk about really personal stuff with other runners that they don't even know. Some run to lose themselves. Other runners run to find themselves. All runners run to add another cool t-shirt to their collection. Some runners use Vaseline and or stick Band-Aids in places we're not going to talk here, and most runners agree that toenail loss is a sign of pride. Runners love a good, long streak of days, months, or even years during which they've run without missing a day, ever, for any reason. Like, for 16 years, say, there was no reason not to run every day; never too hot, too cold, too wet, too dark, too light, too anything NOT to run, for 16 years, including a marathon that took over 5 hours to complete. Not that I would know. Runners do weird things. But man, oh, man... are runners committed.

We're nearing the end of our series called "No Matter What..." We've been using the book of Philippians to help us discover how God is constantly revealing a pathway to a more thriving way of life no matter what our circumstances. The voice and words of the Apostle Paul have echoed through the centuries speaking relevant, ancient wisdom into our lives today. Last week Pastor Sandy reminded us of the priceless treasure Christ. Before that, Pastor Jeff talked about how God equips us to shine like bright stars in a dark world, and the importance of being unified in our mission together. We began the series reflecting on how rejoicing and practicing gratitude are foundational for thriving lives of faith. Today, as

we near the finish line of this series, I want to share some insights on what it means to finish strong, to continue to run this race with passion so that we reach the purpose that Jesus has called us to fulfil.

The language of running is everywhere in the bible. And it's not just running for running sake, but it's running for a purpose and with endurance; keeping at it no matter what. In the Hebrew scriptures, God tells the prophet Habakkuk to write God's word on a tablet and make it plain so that the runner can run with it, and easily show others. The prophet Isaiah reminds the reader that those who hope in the lord will renew their strength, soar like eagles; they will run and not faint. In the Christian scriptures, Paul writes about running the race set out before us.

In Philippians, Paul uses that image of running again to inspire Christ followers to keep at it, no matter what. If you've got your bible with you, I'd like you to turn with me to Philippians 3:12-16. I'm going to read this section from The Passion Translation. And then I want to walk us through a few verses, make a few observations, and then draw a couple of important conclusions.

*I admit that I haven't yet acquired the absolute fullness that I'm pursuing, but I [press on] run with passion into his abundance so that I may reach the purpose that Jesus Christ has called me to fulfill and wants me to discover. I don't depend on my own strength to accomplish this; however I do have one compelling focus: I forget all of the past as I fasten my heart to the future instead. I run straight for the divine invitation of reaching the heavenly goal and gaining the victory-prize through the anointing of Jesus. So let all who are fully mature have this same passion, and if anyone is not yet gripped by these desires, God will reveal it to them. And let us all advance together to reach this victory-prize, following one path with one passion.*

This is the word of God for the people of God.  
Thanks be to God.

As we continue to press on as a congregation into the future that God is creating among us, it will be increasingly important for us to keep in mind this idea of running a race. We know why we're running. We're running because Jesus has called us to be part of the race. We know there's a route. That route has been articulated clearly in our mission and vision. And we know where we're going. We're going forward. But in this passage from Philippians, Paul

reveals some important wisdom for navigating the route, how to navigate it, and where all of that will lead us. So, if you've got your bibles with you, let's peel back the layers of this passage.

**The first thing I want you to notice is Paul's motivation: He knows he's loved.**

Paul is absolutely secure in Jesus' love for him. And that's all he needs as he continues to press into his mission to love God and love others. Let's look at verse 12. Paul acknowledges that knowing Jesus and the power of the resurrection in his life, even in the midst of suffering is the fire in the engine of his heart. He's focused on the goal of fully knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection in his life, and although he hasn't reached that goal yet, he's all about one thing. He writes, "I press on, I run with passion to make that goal my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own." Paul is saying, "I'm going to love God because God has first loved me. And I'm going to love others the way Jesus has loved me."

It's natural in our lives when someone shows us kindness, some love, some affection, that we either want to pay that forward, or share that love back. You know how it is when someone gives you a gift or expresses kindness and love that you want to share that with others. That's what Paul is encouraging here. He knows that God has gone to extravagant lengths to show us love. We get to respond to that love by loving others, and loving God right back. Loving kindness creates more loving kindness. We are loved by God and that's our motivation for doing everything we do.

**The second thing I want you to see is Paul's commitment: He's hyper-focused.**

Paul has one thing in mind and one thing only. Let's look at verse 13. "This one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind, I'm straining forward to what lies ahead." You can almost hear him saying, "Watch what you're doing. Stay focused. Keep your mission right in front of you no matter what's going on around you. Stay with it no matter what, because if you don't, well, you just might miss something important."

Here's a good example. Just a few years ago, Tanguy Pepiot [pronounced "Tanjay Pep-ee-o"] a runner, a track star from the University of Oregon thought he had the race all locked up. He had the finish line in his sights, so he began to let up, slow down, he took

his mind off what he was doing. Tanguy was waving to the crowd and getting them excited about his victory. What he did not see was a University of Washington runner [Go Huskies!] quickly coming up behind him. Just take a look at this video clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWa9iYYPYF4> Man, that's painful. Did you hear what the announcer said? "Take my word for it, there's a moral to this story." I guess so! The other runner from the UW passed him by and Tanguy lost the race because he let up at the end. He laid on the track in shock and disbelief. All because he celebrated too early.

Now, I am not saying that we can never celebrate what's going on in our lives of faith with one another. We can, and we certainly should celebrate what God is up to in and through the body of Christ everywhere. But what I am saying is no matter what, stay focused on what God is stirring up in your heart and to keep your eyes on Jesus all along the way. How do we do that? Worship, reading scripture, bible studies, small groups, and the list goes on.

The third thing I want you to see is Paul's perspective: He's a work in progress. And as disciples of Jesus, as followers of Christ, we too are always works in progress. We are not done; we are not finished. In fact, we are only just beginning. Let's look at verse 14. Paul writes, "I press on to toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus."

The metaphor of the "windshield and the rearview mirror" comes to mind here. That metaphor goes like this: Every car has a windshield and a rearview mirror, always with the same ratio of windshield to rearview mirror size. The windshield is approximately 80% bigger than the rearview mirror. It would therefore make sense that we should look forward through the windshield at the road upon which we are heading the majority of the journey. The rearview mirror, although important to glimpse, now and again at where we have come from, is to be used a mere fraction of the drive. You can't drive ahead by looking through the rear-view mirror. We have small rearview mirrors and very large front windshields because what happens in the past is not nearly as important as what happens in the future: where we are going is more significant than where we have been."

We have a rich history here at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church. And that history looms large as we come to another marker on that timeline of history here where it would be really easy to just rest on the energy of where we've been. But looking backward so much so that we get stuck there is unhelpful. As the people of God in this place we're called to "press on" toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. That's a very "Apostle Paul way of saying" what this Pastor Paul – what I'm going to say right now... that as the people of God in this place called Prince of Peace Lutheran Church are called to lean into the amazing future that God is calling us into. We're called to lean into this future with everything we've got, knowing that sometimes it's going to seem like a sprint, at other times it's going to feel like a marathon. But whatever the case, God cheers us on as we cheer one another on. And with every lap and every mile, we're getting closer and closer to God's new dream for this place.