

## Turning Loose So We Can Run Forward

Last Sunday we talked about looking back so we could move forward. We looked back to see God's faithfulness, the workings of his grace in our lives and in our history. We looked back to acknowledge his presence every day of the journey thus far and to give us assurance of his presence every day of the journey ahead.

But this morning, on the first Sunday of 2009, I want to talk to you about turning loose so we can move forward. In fact I called this **Turning Loose So We Can Run Forward**. I want us to make better progress this year. Turn with me to Philippians 3:12-16 and allow me to make some observations about this passage of Scripture.

**“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, 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, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.” Philippians 3:12-16**

Paul is referring to earlier verses in the chapter as he acknowledges that he has not yet obtained all that he desires in Christ. He is not yet fully conformed to the image of Christ, to his righteousness, to the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings. But he tells us he is pressing on to lay hold of all of God's purposes for his life. He is pressing on because he intends to reach the goal. He is running forward with all that is within him. He says he is straining toward what is ahead in verse 13 – that means he is leaning in toward the finish line, determined to win the race.

But it's not enough to lean forward, to run forward, pressing for the finish line if you've not taken care of some initial business. So Paul gives us some insight in to how best to run and win the race.

First of all you have to turn loose of the things that are holding you back. Verse 12 Paul said, “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” In order to take hold of what Christ has for you to be, you have to first turn loose of some

things. There are things in your life that don't belong. There are things you are holding onto that keep you from taking hold of the purposes of Christ for your life. You can't be all God intended you to be if you are still holding on to things that displease God, that separate you from fellowship, that destroy and defeat your walk with God. You can't take hold of the blessings of God and the plan and purpose of God when you are still holding on to sins and thoughts and actions that displease God. You can't take hold of God while you are still holding onto the wounds and the guilt and mistakes of your past.

**You've got to turn loose before you can take hold!**

Paul had to **Turn loose of pride** – pride in his accomplishments, in his own righteousness. He speaks of those things in verses 4-9. You can't take hold of the righteousness of God in Christ if you are still depending upon your own goodness, holding on to your own righteousness. If you think you can please God and earn his favor by your best efforts and all your hard work, you'll never take hold of the blessings of God. Paul said he counted all of his accomplishments, all of his self-righteousness and "legalistic righteousness" he called it – he counted it all as rubbish, as dung the King James version refers to it, compared to knowing Christ – compared to taking hold of him and his purposes for his life. You've got to turn loose before you can take hold. Some of you need to let go of some things you are holding on to because it is all rubbish, garbage, dung, compared to knowing Christ and his presence and living out his will for your life.

Some of us need to **Turn loose of toxic feelings and emotions**. I'm referring to those things like unresolved anger, unforgiveness, bitterness, that poison us and everyone around us. We need to let go of grudges and spiteful feelings we have toward others over some event in the past. You were wronged and you've held on to the wound, held on to the feelings it produced in you, held on to the sense of betrayal you felt. You've held on to your rights that were violated and the result has been?..... you've not been able to take hold of God's grace and forgiveness and mercy for your own life because you've been holding on to these vengeful feelings toward someone else. It's time you turned loose of those feelings so you can take hold of God's promises and his best for you.

You need to **Turn loose of your claim against someone else**. "Yes, but I was

the innocent party and I deserve satisfaction. Justice has never been done.” You know what? You need to turn loose of that and leave all of that in the hands of the only just and righteous judge, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only one that can sort that out. He is the one who knows and judges the thoughts and intents and motives of the heart. You can’t be the judge, you’re the plaintiff in the case and you’re prejudiced. Stop trying to judge. Put it in God’s hands, turn loose of it so you can take hold of all God has for you. Turn loose so you can take hold of God this year.

**Turn loose of that person.** You know, the one you’ve been blaming for all your problems and troubles. The one who hurt you, who abused you, who victimized you. Release them into God’s hands. Turn loose so you can take hold of God’s blessing and his plan for your life. God has prepared a life of freedom and liberty for you where you are no longer bound to the status and identity of victim. It’s time to be free, but you’ll have to turn loose before you can take hold of that new identity in Christ. Whom the Son sets free is free indeed. Stop nursing the old wounds. Let them be. Turn loose in order to take hold of him!

Not only did Paul turn loose of the past in order to take hold of all Jesus had for him, he also said he was **“Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus..”** **Not only do we turn loose in order to take hold, we forget what is behind in order to win the prize.** The prize for Paul and for all of us is to know Christ in fullness and completeness. It is to finally be at home with him, to know him in full realization.

To say we forget what is behind, to forget the past is not quite realistic. The truth is none of us can really forget everything in the past. We wouldn’t even want to. Paul hasn’t forgotten all the past, in fact he has just recounted some of it for us in v4-6, but Gordon Fee in his commentary on Philippians says it could be better translated as “pay no attention to.” Paul pays no attention to what is behind him. He will not allow the past, his mistakes, his failures, his success, his accomplishments, he won’t let any of those things distract him. Instead he will remain focused on the goal.

Friends, you can’t change the events of 2008. For some of you, it’s time to turn out the lights on some of the events and the situations of 2008. You’ll have to put those

things in God's hands and leave them there and then you'll have to move on in faith into this new year. Learn from the mistakes, take the lessons with you, but as we've already emphasized, leave the grudges, the burdens, the worries of 2008, leave them in 2008 and move on.

Don't allow the events of 2008 to turn you into a victim in 2009. What happened, happened. But now it's a new year, a new day. Don't be a victim, be an overcomer in Christ. Don't allow the past to distract you from the goal, from the calling and purpose of God.

I watched an ORU chapel speaker on tv a week ago. An ORU alumni named Bobby Petricelli. He told the students at ORU that **"Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional. Offenses are inevitable, forgiveness is optional. Change is inevitable, growth is optional. How we respond in these situations in all areas of our life determines our success."** You don't have to be a victim. You don't have to suffer from the toxic poison of unforgiveness. You can choose to seek the Lord and to walk in his ways. You can choose to allow all of the things of the past to keep tripping you up and slowing you down, or you can do as Paul did and determine to no longer be distracted by the past. Don't let anyone or anything distract you from pursuing the prize of knowing Jesus and serving him and living for him.

Paul tells us to turn loose in order to take hold. Forget what's behind in order to win the prize. And then we are told to **Strain toward what is ahead**. Paul is telling us to give it all we've got. The image he is giving us is of runners racing for the finish line and they are leaning forward, straining with all their might and strength to be first to cross the finish line and win the prize.

Paul is single minded about this. He is telling us to devote ourselves to the pursuit of Christ with all of our heart and soul and strength. "Lord, I don't know what you have prepared for me in this year of 2009, but I choose to devote my heart and my life to you. I will prepare my heart for all that your destiny and your will calls me to." Are you willing to pursue a vital, intimate, obedient, surrendered, passionate relationship with Jesus Christ this year?

I love this chapter. Remember what Paul says in verse 8? **"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing**

**Christ Jesus my Lord...**” And then look at verse 13. **“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do...”** Gordon Fee in his commentary on Philippians says, “There is no ‘I do’ in Paul’s narrative; the language is terse and stark: his whole Christian life has been *one thing* – the pursuit of Christ.”  
....Gordon Fee

What a powerful statement. His whole Christian life has been one thing. **“But one thing” – the pursuit of Christ.** “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of one thing – one thing – knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”

This year of 2009:

**Turn loose of all the stuff so you can take hold of Jesus and his plans for your life.**

**Forget what’s behind - don’t be distracted by anything - so you can win the prize and the prize is Jesus. Knowing him, loving him, serving him.**

**Strain toward what is ahead knowing that it’s all about one thing: the pursuit of Christ.**

Paul says, “All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.” This is spiritual growth and maturity. It is found in knowing Jesus. It is found in refusing to be distracted and pressing on toward the prize of knowing Jesus and living out his plans and purpose for your life.

Then Paul says in verse 16, “Only let us live up to what we have already attained.” What are you going to do in 2009? What will the year hold for us? What is the vision for 2009? Let’s do this: “Let’s live up to what we have already attained.” Let’s purpose in our hearts that we are going to live like the people who are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says we have been “taken hold of by Christ.” He is pursuing Christ and pressing on to win the prize for which God has called him. We too have been taken hold of by Christ. He found us. He took hold of us. He has a greater purpose for us than anything we can create for ourselves. So let’s live like people that belong to Jesus. Let’s live like the people who are totally sold out to him. Let’s make whatever changes we need to make to truly go after God and his purposes for our lives this year. Let’s ask God for the insight and the grace needed to make the changes necessary to

be all he's called us to be and to do all he has called us to do in 2009.

If you need to turn loose of something – do it. If you need to forget something, to stop being distracted by the stuff from the past - do it. If you need to discipline yourself to strain forward toward the finish line - do it. If you need to reduce life down to that one thing - one thing - the pursuit of Christ – do it.

Do what is necessary to make 2009 the year of faithfully living for Jesus.