



Life is a miracle, isn't it? You know, scientists make a distinction between living and non-living things. That sounds simple but sometimes it's hard to decide if something is really alive or not. So they've come up with all kinds of characteristics of living things, and do you know what's at the top of the list? Movement. Movement is characteristic of all living things. If you're not moving, you're more than likely dead. This is true in our spiritual life. If there's no movement, you may be dead.

Our theme today is MOVE. We've called this gathering "Unite" because all three of our campuses are together, but our goal as a church isn't to unite, rather it's to make and mature more followers of Christ. As a church and as individuals we need to MOVE towards that goal, but to do that, we must be united. So I guess we can say, "UNITED we MOVE." Movement is always necessary for life and growth.

Take the Thessalonians as an example. Paul had led many of them to Christ and founded this church, and they were doing well, but he challenges them to keep moving.

Paul Commended the Thessalonians but Urged Them to More

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1 he commends them. He says, "*We instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living.*" That's a compliment. They were living to please God.

Down in verses 9 and 10 he gets more specific. He says, "*You have been taught by God to love one another. And in fact you do love all of God's family...*" Again, that's a good thing. Jesus taught us to love one another. That's a pat on the back.

If I were them I'd be feeling very good about myself. I'd be satisfied and content with my spiritual progress. I might even kind of relax a bit like a team with a 5-run lead going into the ninth inning.

Paul understood that so look what he says two different times. In verse 1, after he commends them for living in a way that pleases God he says, "*Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.*" Then in verse 10, after patting them on the back for their love for God's people he says, "*Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, do so more and more.*" They'd done well, but still could do even better.

Growing up, all of us heard these words from time to time, "You can do better." I can remember my father saying that to me after I brought home my report card. I was proud of that report card,

but my dad said, "That's good, but you can do better." I can remember feeling pretty darn good after winning a big football game and my coach saying, "You played well, but you can do better." That's what Paul is saying.

As individuals, there are some of us here doing great. I see it. I see people in this church serving in so many different ways. I see people devoting their time and money and talents. I commend you for that, but you know what? You can do better. Same thing as a church. As a church, we're doing so much. I love this church. I've seen churches all over the world and I don't know of any church I'd rather be a part of, but you know what? We can do better.

Maybe that's why the Bible often compares the Christian life to a race we're in until we die. In a race, you have to keep moving and pushing ahead until you cross the finish line.

The Most Frequent Metaphor for the Christian Life is a Race

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul says, "*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 get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize*" (vv. 24-27).

Then in Philippians 3 he says, "*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, 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*" (vv. 12-14).

Hebrews 12 says, "*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*" (vv. 1-2).

As I read these verses, I see several things that are key to running this race. What are they?

We Must Move

First we must move. In a race you can't stand still. He says, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run...? Forward progress is necessary. Imagine a runner, seeing he's ahead in the middle of the race, and saying, "Hey look at me. I'm winning! I think I'll stop now."

There's no stopping in the Christian life. You never get to that place where you've arrived. Even the great apostle Paul, who'd done so much to serve Christ, who'd been beaten and bloodied for the sake of the gospel, could say, "I haven't arrived yet. I'm still pressing on."

In a conversation at a dinner party, Albert Einstein's young neighbor asked the white-haired scientist, "What is your profession?" He replied, "I devote myself to the study of physics." The girl was shocked and said, "You study physics at your age? I finished physics a year ago!"

You see, no matter how much we've accomplished, no matter how far we've come, we're never finished. And there's a danger in thinking we've finished. There's a danger in thinking we've arrived. Not only do we stop short of our goal, we become lazy and prideful and vulnerable to temptation. It was when David stayed home and should have been out on the battlefield that he got in trouble with Bathsheba.

So, we must move, but movement alone isn't enough.

We Must Move in the Right Direction

Paul says, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize." It's not enough to run hard; you have to run hard in the right direction.

There's a great deal of movement in the Silicon Valley. Everyone is busy. Everyone is going somewhere. There's even a kind of Christianity that never stops and is filled with endless activity. That's not what we're talking about here.

That's not how Jesus lived. He ran hard. There were times he didn't even have time to stop and eat, but Jesus also knew when to withdraw from the crowds and spend time alone with his Father. Jesus knew that pausing and reflecting and being still was part of running the race.

Paul tells us the direction we're to run. He says run towards a goal in order to win the prize. There's some debate among Bible scholars over what that prize is, but I believe it's for us to take full possession of our eternal inheritance in the kingdom of God. That's what we strive for. Most of us settle for far too little. We strive for things that have no shelf life. We become satisfied with the trinkets of this life. Paul says to press on towards "a crown that will last forever." God has called him "heavenward" to receive it. We don't get it here; we get it there. That's what we strive and push ahead for. That's the goal. That's the prize.

A couple of years ago I started swimming for exercise. I've decided swimming a mile once or twice a week is perfect for me. I can do it in about 35 minutes. I get a decent workout, and so I'm not trying to go further or even to swim faster. The problem is I have no goal. There's no prize so it's hard to stay motivated. That's not good. There's a lot of believers like that. They figure, "Well, I'm saved. I'm going to heaven when I die. I go to church two or three times a month. I even put some money in the offering plate when it goes by." But there's no goal. There's no pressing on for the prize. For Paul there was an urgency about that.

Reaching the goal and obtaining the prize won't be easy.

We Must Apply Effort

Sometimes we think effort is antithetical to grace. I don't have to press on and strive for the goal because grace isn't about what I do but what God does. But grace isn't opposed to effort, but to earning.

Whatever Paul was talking about, it required effort. He talks about strict training, self discipline and perseverance. All these things are necessary to run the race.

Part of the effort involves dealing with things that keep us from running well. Hebrews says throw off all that hinders and the sin which entangles us. These are two different things, but they both will keep us from finishing the race. There are things in our lives that aren't sinful, but they aren't helpful either. They hinder us. They get in the way. It may not be sinful to watch five hours of TV each night, but it's not helpful either when it comes to running the race. It takes effort to deal not only with sin but with those things that just get in the way.

It also takes effort to forget what lies behind. That's what Paul says he does, "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead." For Paul that meant leaving behind his impeccable religious credentials. Earlier in chapter 3 he says he was "*a Hebrew of Hebrews*" and "*as for righteousness based on the law, faultless*" (Philippians 3:5b-6). He needed to forget all that because self righteousness hindered him from pursuing Christ. To run this race, there are things you'll need to forget. It might be something that gave a deep sense of value and significance, but gets in the way of following Christ. Or it may be some sin or black mark on your record that haunts you and makes you feel like a loser. That, too, needs to be forgotten.

It takes effort. All of this sounds so hard. We wonder if we have what it takes. Is there any help for us?

We Must Have Help

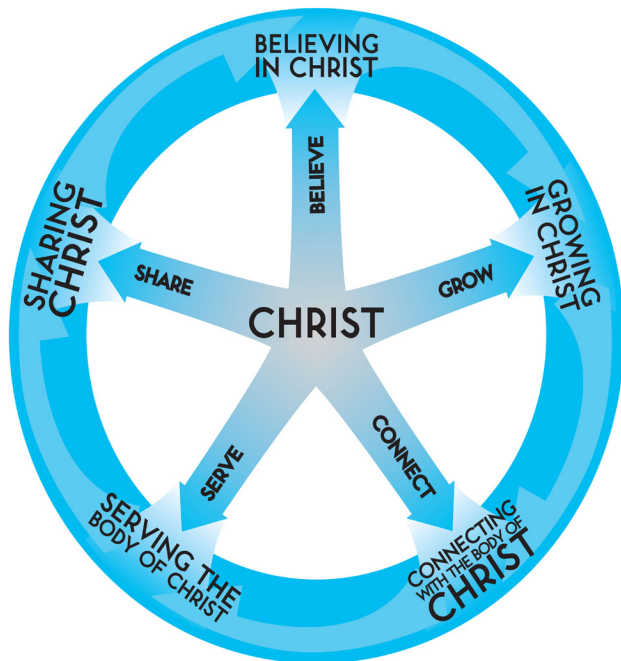
We need some folks to cheer us on. We have that, Hebrews says, "*We're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.*" He's talking about all the heroes of faith described in chapter 11. It's as if they're cheering us on to the same victory in the life of faith they obtained. Their faith and perseverance inspires us to run.

We also have one great example; someone who went before us to show us how it's done. Our example is Jesus. It says, *"fixing our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."* Whatever we have to sacrifice to run this race well, it's nothing compared to Jesus. But, like him, when we do have to make those hard choices it helps to think of the joy set before us.

About 15 years ago I ran a marathon and what I remember most was the last 100 yards and the joy of crossing the finish line. My wife and all three of my kids were there, smiling, cheering and waiting. It was sheer joy. Whatever sacrifice you and I have to make in this life to run this is nothing compared to the joy of crossing that finish line and seeing Jesus.

We have some folks to cheer us on, a great example in Jesus, and we have one more thing to help us. The strength to run the race isn't our own; it comes from him. Paul alludes to this when he says, *"I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."* So it's not all about us striving to reach the prize; it's about him who took hold of us and still holds us today. In another letter Paul says the goal of his ministry is to present every person mature in Christ and then he says, *"For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me"* (Colossians 1:29). Whatever progress we make in this race, it's his power working within us that makes all the difference. So as we press on and run towards the goal, we depend on him; we even rest in him, like the best sprinters relax their muscles throughout the race.

What's Your MOVE Today as You Run this Race?



I want to encourage each of us today to ask yourself, What's my next MOVE today as I run this race? Take a look at this wheel and determine where you're at and what you need to do to MOVE forward.

Some of you have yet to enter the race. You get in the race by starting with the spoke at the top—**Believe** in Christ. Statistics show the longer you sit in church without making a decision to trust Christ the less likely that will ever happen. So not making a decision for Christ is making a decision to go in the other direction. You may not have the luxury of waiting. It may be time for you to say, "Yes, I believe" and get in the race.

Some of you have just entered the race and you need to start **Growing** in Christ. Do you know what we've discovered? The single most significant thing you can do to grow is to read and reflect on the Bible.

Some of you are in the race but you're running all alone without any help from others. Maybe you've become complacent. You've come a long way and done well, but now you're kind of coasting. Maybe something is hindering you from moving ahead. You need to **Connect** in community and you need to find a way to **Serve** that takes you out of your comfort zone. You can find ways to do that at the table.

I know many of you are running hard in the right direction. You're making a difference, but you can do better. Maybe you're doing all these things but you can't recall the last time you **Shared** your faith with someone. This is an area that I feel I need to make a move.

This past week I was at the AT&T store and engaged in talking with a young woman about God. She said to me, "My God is good." And I'm like, "Amen! He is good!" But then she said, "No. I mean **good** is my God. Whatever is good, that's God." So we had a little talk about that. And you know what I realized when I finished that conversation? It energized my faith. It made me want to run harder. Maybe that's the move you need to make today.

So let me leave you with a few questions: Are you in the race? If you are in the race, are you moving forward towards the goal or have you become complacent? Are you making every effort to press on? Are you taking advantage of the help he provides, both the example he set and the strength he provides?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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