

**There have been many legends and myths written about famous leaders of the past, and I really haven't taken the time to verify if they are factual or exaggerated for effect, but at least they make for inspiring stories. One of the stories that I read said that it took Winston Churchill three years to get through the eighth grade because he had trouble learning English. In kind of an ironic twist, years later in the midst of World War II, Oxford University asked then Prime Minister Churchill to address its commencement exercises. Dressed in his finest suit, he arrived at the auditorium where the service was to be held, with his usual props, a cigar, a cane and a top hat. As Churchill approached the podium, the crowd rose in appreciative applause. Standing there looking very dignified, he settled the crowd down and asked them to be seated.**

**Standing confidently before this crowd of great admirers, he removed his cigar and placed his top hat on the podium.**

**Then Churchill gazed at his waiting audience that included some of the most noted scholars in the world. According to the story, his entire speech consisted of, "Never give up..."**

**Never.... Never.... Never.... Never give up!” There was a deafening silence as Churchill reached for his hat and cigar, steadied himself with his cane and left the platform. His commencement address was finished.**

**Please stand with me if you are able as we read today’s scripture from Philippians 3:10-14.**

**Like Churchill, I think the apostle Paul knew the importance of never giving up when he, using his own life as an example, encouraged the church to “forget what is behind” and to “strain toward what is ahead.” This morning, I want to look at the importance of both of those aspects for our church. I had originally planned this message for New Years, but I wanted to start the new year looking at the importance of our outreach to the lost around us and ways that we can reach our community for Christ. Even though we’re well into the new year, it’s good to look back and look at what happened in the previous year. The challenges and successes, the highs and lows, the joys and the sorrows. It’s good to see what went right and what went wrong, to think about how we can better serve God going forward. But it’s**

**just a glimpse over our shoulder. All too often a church stops, turns around, and stands there admiring its past through rose-colored glasses and never waking up and moving forward... Think about it; the descendants of Abraham didn't really become the Nation of Israel until they moved out of Egypt under Moses. They had a long history, but up until that time, for all intents and purposes, they were just a big on-going family reunion. Some of them even wanted to go back to Egypt... "Remember how good we had it back in Egypt with homes and food and water?".... Paul said "forgetting what's behind". I know we never really forget, so how about "learning from what's behind"?**

**Ok, we've glanced behind. Now it's time to wake up and move forward. The rest of Paul's message hasn't changed, and the need hasn't lessened, so we need to be encouraging each other to never give up in our efforts to grow in our knowledge of God, our love for God, our obedience to God, and our service to God. We need to be moving forward on Jesus' command to reach the lost and dying world around us with the truth of the gospel, and to never give up in our**

**prayers that the power of God would fill us and flow through us as we seek to serve him and those around us.**

**Using Paul's message to the church as our guide, let's see if we can't accomplish several things. First let's try to identify the motivation for living consistent Christian lives. Next, let's ask ourselves how well we really know Christ. Finally, let's see what it will take from each of us if we are to be found straining forward until the very end.**

**The first thing we need to realize is that "Everything" is not Enough.... I have to admit that I am somewhat fascinated by the super-rich. Not from the standpoint of admiring them or envying them. More like the that entranced feeling of watching a train-wreck and not being able to look away. That being said, probably all of us, at one time or another have at least wondered what it would be like to have more money than we could ever spend. Michael Jordan after his retirement from basketball continued to make \$40,000,000 each year in endorsements. That's \$178,000 a day every single day. He still has to pay the same amount to go the movie as the rest of us do, the difference is he is making**

**about \$18,500 while he is in there watching that movie. And if his wife cooks him a three-minute egg, it still takes three minutes but he will make \$618 while it's boiling. It would appear that he has everything—yet everything is not enough. He may be able to afford the finest box seats to every game of the World Series for the next hundred years, but all of his money couldn't buy a bleacher seat in heaven.**

**Paul had everything his world could offer as well. Look at what he told the Philippian church that he had.**

**1. A pedigree – His was without peer. You talk about coming from the right people, you would have a hard time topping Paul.**

**2. A religion – He was one of the brightest young scholars under one of the top teachers of his day.**

**3. Paul was definitely on the fast track to success...nothing could stop him...that is until he came to understand that “everything” is never going to be enough.**

**In the world, we use 'things' to motivate us. We're motivated to work hard in our jobs because we want to provide the best for our families. There is nothing wrong with that kind of motivation, except when it comes into conflict with the designs and workings of God.**

**A pastor shouldn't be motivated to lead their current church to grow so they will be given an opportunity to go to a larger church or get a larger salary. Christian lay men and women should not be motivated to serve in their church in order to receive the praise of men. Our motivation should be much more than that, because if it's not we will soon lose our motivation completely... Wrong motivations never stand up to the trials and challenges of life or the spotlight of truth.**

**The story is told of man who stopped by his pastor's office one day to inform the pastor that he would not be at church any more. He gave a long list of things he didn't like, while the pastor listened quietly. After he was done, the preacher expressed his concern but never tried to talk him out of his decision.**

**As he was getting ready to leave, the pastor asked a favor. It seems that one of the senior adult ladies was having some difficulty paying for some medicine she needed, and a church member who was aware of it had given the preacher \$50 to give to the elderly woman. The pastor hadn't delivered it yet, and asked this man if he would drop it by. He agreed and left.**

**The next Sunday morning he was sitting in the congregation worshipping with his church family. After the service the pastor went to him and said, "I thought you weren't coming back?" To which this now humble gentleman said, "When I got to the lady's house and saw how joyous and appreciative she was, I wished I had been the one who gave the money. I decided right then to stop complaining and to start giving."**

**I hope you have already figured it out, but in case you haven't that is our motivation. We are privileged with the opportunity to serve God and make a difference in people's lives. When we love like Jesus loved, it makes a difference. When we sacrifice like Jesus sacrificed, it makes a**

**difference. And when we pray like Jesus prayed, we will see a difference.**

**What is your motivation today?**

**A second question we need to look at today is ‘Just how Well do you Know Jesus?’**

**Notice how Paul wanted to know Jesus – He said, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,”**

**The power of His resurrection - Resurrection power is life-giving power. Paul wanted to be a participant in the eternal life-giving power of Christ.**

**The fellowship of sharing in His sufferings - Jesus’ life was redemptive in every way, yet there were sufferings in every part of it. Paul spoke about his own willingness to face personal suffering and hardships so that he could bring others to the Redeemer.**

**The likeness of His death - In His death Jesus was lovingly obedient. God's plan for our redemption required Jesus' death and Jesus obeyed that plan because of his love for the father and for us.**

**Paul understood that God's plan of reconciling the world to Himself required Paul's life... That he was willing to both live his life and give his life for God's plan. And Paul was willing to offer his life up to God.**

**There is a question here that we are confronted with; "How well do we want to know Jesus?" Do we want to know His eternal life-giving power enough to trust Him and Him alone to be our Savior and Lord? Do we want to know Jesus well enough to be ridiculed, and to suffer so that we might share His love with others? Do we want to know Him well enough to yield our lives to Him so that He can live His life through us? How well do we really want to know Jesus?**

**It is time to get past superficial things and move into an intimate relationship with the Savior who we say we've given our life to.**

**The third point Paul makes is about ‘Straining ‘till the end.’**

**Paul outlines God’s plan for his life. “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.”**

**Paul leaves no question about his willingness to move forward with Christ. He could look back at everything that he had possessed and experienced in life and know that there was nothing there he wanted to hang on to any longer. The only thing that really mattered was joyously going forward with his own goals now aligned with and in obedience to Christ’s goals.**

**Paul used two unique terms to describe what he was willing to do.**

**straining – like a runner who is putting forth his maximum effort and stretching his whole body out to try and cross the finish line first.**

**press on – Which really means to persevere. To follow steadfastly after the one who is leading.**

**We have to ask ourselves, “How much strain are we putting forth in order to follow on after Jesus?”**

**One of the saddest commentaries of some Christians these days is that they are not even willing to break a sweat for Jesus. You ask some to sacrifice and they look at you like you’re talking in a foreign language or something.**

**Christianity was never intended to be, and should never be thought of as a free ride or a spectator sport. It cost Jesus everything He had. Since He has given everything for us, we should never give up in our efforts for Him. Even if it means that we have to strain forward with everything we have.**

**How about you? Have you given up, or are you willing to strain to the very end for the cause of Christ? As we move forward, there are many challenges in front of us, individually and as a church. Thankfully, I think that in the past few months we’ve started to move beyond sitting back on our laurels and admiring our past, started to move beyond**

**the walls we set up to protect us from the pain that we had suffered as a church in the past year, and have begun to move forward to the future that God wants for us. It won't come easy. We need to continue to grow in our faithfulness, our obedience, our unity, our dedication to loving and serving God and man, and in our commitment to reach out to the lost people that God has placed all around us with the gospel of Christ. Buckle up, I think we're in for a wild ride.**

**Maybe you've been stuck looking back at the past and not moving forward. Maybe you've been unwilling to put forth the effort – to strain and sweat and suffer for the cause of Christ. Or maybe you've never accepted the gift of salvation that Christ died to give you, and so you haven't even started on that race that Paul describes. If so, maybe you need to spend a little time getting right with God. The altar is open during the closing songs. Come and pray.**

**(Closing prayer)**