

## **PHIL 3.14: RUN TO WIN!**

*(Church Motto, Chelmsford 14/1/07)*

Run to win, This year's church motto is taken from Phil 3.14: "**So I RUN straight towards the goal in order TO WIN the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above**". The verse itself is a bit of a mouthful – so we've shortened it – reduced it down to just three words – **RUN TO WIN**.

Instead of having the text printed on a book-mark, we've put it on a fridge-magnet. Why? Because most of us go to the fridge far more often than we open a book. Yes, even if you were to put a book-mark in your Bible, you probably would not see it more than once a day.

But, if you are like me, then you will be constantly going to the fridge – milk for tea, milk for cereal, orange juice with which to begin the day, a cool drink later on, cheese for a late-night biscuit.

Each time you open your fridge, I want to remind you that you are in race. And there's a prize at the end – heaven itself.

"It's a nice snappy text, but why have you chosen this text and not another text?"

Because it reminds me of 40 Days of Purpose

40 Days of Purpose is all about living a Christ-centered life.

True, 40 Days of Purpose is limited to just 40 days – six weeks at the most.

Whereas the race Paul has in mind lasts a life-time.

However, I am hoping that 40 Days of Purpose will prove to be a significant help in the race of faith in which we are all engaged.

In this respect we can perhaps liken 40 Days of Purpose to having the services of a personal trainer for a period of 40 days.

Let me explain: when I go to the gym, I don't talk to a soul as I pound away on the tread-mill. However, some people pay to have the services of a personal trainer, who encourages them to develop an effective fitness-regime.

For many Christians their spiritual walk is a pretty private and individualistic affair – but for 40 days we want to offer you the services of trainer to help you really get spiritually fit – to help you really make some progress in the race of faith.

But let's go back to our text: "**I RUN straight towards the goal in order TO WIN the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above**".

It is actually part of a larger section in which Paul is likening the Christian life to a race. To appreciate fully v14, you need also to read vv12 & 13: "**I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to himself. Of course, my brothers and sisters, I really do not think that I have already won it; the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead**" – "**So I run...to win the prize....**".

### **1. KEEP RUNNING**

Twice Paul says: "**I keep striving to win the prize**" (3.12,14). Other versions: "**I press on toward the goal**" (NRSV; REB; NIV)

The picture here is of a marathalon race.

- In a marathon it is not sufficient to take one's place at the starting blocks and then, when the gun goes, do a 100 yard spring.
- In a marathon what is called for is stamina to keep on and on and on.
- The winner of the marathon is the one who keeps on running.

The same is true in the Christian life. It's not starting which counts, but finishing.

But along with the athletic imagery, there is another picture.

For the underlying Greek word (*diokein*) was also used of a hunter pursuing his quarry – "I pursue the prize" "I hunt it down", "I chase after it".

My life-time's ambition is to win this prize, and to do so it I've got to keep running.

The mantra today in education is life-long learning.

In the Christian life what counts is life-long energy devoted to running the race of faith.

There is more to the Christian life than simply believing Jesus died on the Cross for you and for me. The Christian life cannot be reduced to easy believism.

Faith involves following Jesus, risking our all for Jesus, giving our all to Jesus, going all out for Jesus.

The question all of us need to face today is

- Are we still striving/pressing on/giving our all?
- Are we still running in the race of faith?
- Or have we in fact come to stop?
- Did we at some stage sat down for a breather, and have never got up again since?

Or to put it another way:

- How far along the Christian way you I progressed?
- Have I only just passed the starters' flag?
- What progress have I made in the last year - let alone the last 5 or 10 years?
- To what extent does my life increasingly reflect the life of Xt?

Don't despair that you haven't yet made it... Even the Apostle Paul could say: "**I do not claim that I have already succeeded or already become perfect...**".

But he did go on to say, "**I keep striving**", I keep pressing on.

The important thing is that we are making progress; that we are keep on growing and developing in the Christian life; that the grace of the Lord Jesus is increasingly reflected in our lives.

## 2. BE SINGLE-MINDED

"**The one thing I do**" (v13)

Peterson in his paraphrase The Message writes: "*let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us*". Nothing "*less than total commitment*" is needed.

We need to concentrate on the task in hand.

To succeed in any sport today, it is not sufficient to be talented - you've got to work at your talent. E.g. if you are a swimmer, you've got to swim not just once/twice a week - but every day. Not just one/two hours - but every spare hour of waking time.

You've got to be single-minded if you want to win.

The same thing applies to Christian life.

We need to *become single-minded* about the race in which we are involved.

"**The one thing I do**" - writes Paul.

This will involve a degree of *self-discipline*:

**"Every athlete in training submits to strict discipline, in order to be crowned with a wreath that will not last; but we do it for one that will last forever. That is why I run straight for the finishing line...."** (1 Cor 9.25).

If we are to run to win, then we need to live our lives within some kind of disciplined framework. Such a discipline will involve developing some kind of rule of life, in which we have time to pray, time to study God's Word, time to be quiet and to draw fresh strength for our daily living.

Precisely how we will do that will vary - from person to person. But discipline, however varied, is most certainly needed.

### 3. NO LOOKING BACK

**"The one thing I do is to forget what is behind me"** (v13)

A runner who keeps looking back is never going to win - such a runner is liable to stumble - certainly the pace will lessen.

What is true of running, is also true of the spiritual life. In our Christian life we can't afford to be ever looking backwards.

What precisely do we need to forget?

- **Forget past failures.** Some of us know exactly where we have failed God in the past & we are still ashamed of it - we keep ugly skeletons in the closets of our memory & think it virtuous to open the door occasionally & torture ourselves by remembering what these skeletons looked like when they were clothed in flesh & blood of sin. But Good News is when God forgives, he forgives completely – our past is gone – buried as it were in the deepest sea.
- **Forget past happinesses.** We shall never make any progress in the Christian life we continually hark back to what we deem were happier times. It's very easy for the bereaved, for instance, to live in the past, to forever compare the present unfavourably with the past, and in this way never come to terms with the challenges of the present. Of course we cannot forget loved ones - but we must not allow the death of a loved one to stop our ongoing walk with God.
- **Forget past hurts.** We likewise make no progress in the Christian life if we harbour persistent bitterness about past wrongs and hurts. However much we have been wronged, we have to learn to forgive and then to let go. Nothing can be more destructive than resentment. Nothing can hinder us more in the Christian life than dwelling on the past wrongs of others.
- **Forget past achievements.** That may sound strange, but, the context indicates that probably it is this which Paul has in mind in particular. Success can as much paralyse action as failure. We may be so impressed with the progress we have made, that we fail to realise how much more progress God would have us make. We sit back on our laurels and become complacent

#### 4. GIVE IT EVERYTHING YOU'VE GOT

**"The one thing I do is to ... do my best to reach what is ahead. So I run straight towards the goal in order to win the prize**

Other versions speak of "*straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal*" (so NRSV; similarly NIV).

The picture is of a runner going hard for the tape, who has eyes for nothing but the goal - with arms almost clawing the air, head forward, the whole body bent & angled to the goal. It describes a person going flat out for the finish.

You can imagine the lungs burning, the temples pounding, the muscles aching, the heart pumping, the perspiration rolling.

I'm reminded of my efforts in the gym. When I go to the gym I give it all I've got. Instead of running on the level, I set the machine on an incline - I hold weights in both hands, and then power-walk as fast as I can - every other minute or so I will make the treadmill go even faster, so that I have to run - the perspiration pours down - my shirt gets absolutely - but I am determined in that hour to give it everything I've got in order to try and keep fit.

In the race of faith Paul wants us to give all we've got. **Run to win.**

Of course the metaphor = not perfect. It breaks down.

In a race only one wins the prize, whereas in the Xian race there are many winners. But the metaphor holds in this one respect - ***we need to give it everything we've got.***

Jesus never promised that as a result of following him we would be healthy & wealthy. He only promised 'blood, sweat and tears'.

He said that to go his way was to go the way of the Cross.

Going Christ's way involves sacrifice.

Paul spoke of "**sharing in Xt's sufferings**" - at that very moment chained to Roman soldier in Roman goal. It can be tough being a Christian.

BUT the prize makes the enterprise more than worthwhile - for it is "**God's call thro Xt JX to the life above**". Paul does not elaborate here on the prize. But elsewhere he wrote:

- **"I have done my best in the race, I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day"** (1 Tim 4.7-8)
- **"What no one ever saw or heard, what no one ever thought could happen, is the very thing God prepared for those who love him"** (1 Cor 2.9).

There is a wonderful future ahead for those who complete the race of faith. What more glorious a prize could there be.

So let's **RUN TO WIN!**