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Pressing Forward And Keeping Focused  
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We know that as the new year begins that we may be thinking of making New Years resolutions for the upcoming year. This is not always necessary, as most of those resolutions fall by the wayside, however, we realize that there should be change in our lives, a change for the better and however we approach this decision, it needs to be directed with our spiritual walk with the Lord, not just something that effects our natural desires. As we begin to look at the following scriptures, Paul tells us that "our goal must be a focus on the future for the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, leaving behind and forgetting those things in the past."

The principles we have learned previously, are we must stay focused, putting the Word of God first, not allowing ourselves to be distracted by making excuses and blaming everyone else as to why we are not being successful in our lives and not doing right.

Phil 3:13-14 "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." KJV

Phil 1:6 "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:" KJV

Paul is sharing with the Philippians even though he was in prison, how he continued to press to the mark, still reaching forward, not holding onto the past but looking to the future knowing that the good work would be completed in him. God is still working to complete that same good work in all of us.

In order for us to keep our focus and not become distracted and make excuses, the emphasis in this teaching will be more of how to become disciples of Christ, is there a price to pay or is there an area of discipline in our lives that must be implemented in order for us to be a disciple? A disciple is someone who is more than just born again, many people are born again, but not all are disciples.

Luke 6:46 "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" KJV

For Jesus to become Lord of our lives, we become a doer of the Word and we implement a measure of discipline or self control in our lives. Discipline is a word that is probably not in our vocabulary, discipline means to be under control, self restraint, be trained or develop by instruction, learning to listen to avoid trouble.

Luke 14:26-33 "If any man come to me, and \*hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. 27 And whosoever doth not bear his \*cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? 29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, 30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. 31 Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? 32 Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassador, and desireth conditions of peace. 33 So

likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." KJV

\*Hate means to be loveless. \*Cross means self-denial.

At this time in Jesus' life we see great crowds following him, he was very popular but at this time in his ministry he begins to teach his disciples, that He must be first place, letting everything and everyone go regardless of who they were. He did not use the word convert or believer but used the word disciple. The word disciple is defined as a disciplined follower.

Jesus wants people to enjoy life and have fun, but our plans must be submissive to God's purposes and plans. We must change our plans when we know that God has another plan for us to do, putting ours on hold until a later time. There is a price to pay for being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, by bringing our flesh under control. Dealing with our flesh includes many different things, our prayer life, our Bible reading. The price to pay or the cost to finish must be considered beforehand.

Jesus as He taught in parables and illustrations, did not always emphasize the beginning or starting of our lives, but on the finishing of our life. Many times people will start to do something, but fail to finish, we see this in the Old Testament with the kings, great starters but they did not finish well. Jesus teaches the importance of finishing and for us to finish we must develop discipline in our lives. People will often judge by what they see being done in the lives of believers, always doubting them as to whether they will finish their goal or fall short and never reach the finish line because of the past. We must all be submissive to the plan of God in order to be strong finishers, putting things in our lives on hold until a future time for the sake of the kingdom. Kingdom principles make it possible for lives to be changed be set free and equipped to live as God would have them to do. In order to be a disciple, we must keep pressing in.

Luke 16:16 "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." KJV

How do we become a disciplined follower, a disciple that finishes the course?

Phil 3:13-14 "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" KJV

Paul let go of the things behind, because he knew that there was still more and he was reaching for it.

Example was given of Booker T. Washington, a black man who refused to make excuses because of his color, he needed bricks to build a school, so he made his own, then he taught others how to make them, he was an educated man, he was a preacher who kept pressing in. He said "I will permit no man to narrow and degrade my soul by making him hate me."

John 8:31-33 "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. 33 They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?" KJV

Jesus taught the Jews who believed on him as well as his disciples to continue in His word, not

just being born again, setting down and doing nothing. Continuing in the word allows us to be free, knowing the truth sets us free. Knowing the truth will enable us to be free from the past; we are not that person we used to be.

1 Cor 9:24-27 "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may \*obtain. 25 And every man that \*striveth for the mastery is \*temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. 26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." KJV

\*Obtain means to seize or possess and to finish. \*Temperate means disciplined, self controlled, restraint in our lives. \*Strive means a struggle or to \*\*contend with an adversary,

Paul is teaching we are not under works, ritual or law but the law we are under is the law of Christ, learning to walk in love, finishing the race. Only one is going to finish and receive the prize of a natural race, but we are running to obtain the prize that God has for us, an incorruptible crown. We must run to win. Paul said to run with purpose, not just show up, it will take discipline in our lives. God blesses us in obedience.

\*\*Eph 6:12 "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." KJV

We do have an adversary and his name is Satan, but greater is he who is in us and we will win

1 Cor 9:26-27 "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." KJV

1 Cor 9:26-27 "Therefore I do not run without a definite goal; I do not flail around like one beating the air [just shadow boxing]. 27 But [like a boxer] I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached [the gospel] to others, I myself will not somehow be disqualified [as unfit for service]." AMP

1 Cor 9:26-27 "So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing. 27 I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified." NLT

Paul teaches us that we must keep our bodies in subjection, having a definite goal, purpose in every step, in order to have a positive appearance to others. We are to discipline our bodies; our flesh is to come in agreement with the soulish part of us in our spirit. Every step or decision we make should bring us closer to the finish line or the mark or goal that we have in our life, if this does not happen then it is the wrong step. Training our bodies' demands discipline, regardless of what areas we go into. There is a price to pay if we are going to be disciples.

Paul is knowing that his time on earth is about to be over and his departure will be soon, but he knows that he has fought the fight and has finished the race, kept the faith and is awaiting his crown of righteousness which he will receive from the Lord. We will be winners as we finish the course, we will get our crowns of righteousness.

2 Tim 4:6-8 "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all

them also that love his appearing." KJV

2 Tim 4:6-8 "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure [from this world] is at hand *and* I will soon go free. 7 I have fought the good *and* worthy *and* noble fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith [firmly guarding the gospel against error]. 8 In the future there is reserved for me the [victor's] crown of righteousness [for being right with God and doing right], which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that [great] day—and not to me only, but also to all those who have loved *and* longed for *and* welcomed His appearing." AMP

2 Tim 4:6-8 "As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. 8 And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing." NLT

Heb 12:2-3 "Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on *Jesus*, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's *there*, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. *That* will shoot adrenaline into your souls!" MESSAGE

Keep your eyes on Jesus, finish the race that is before us, study how Jesus did it, and stay focused on the goal. Don't set down and quit, continue learning how to be a disciple of Jesus. We are finishers, we are strong finishers.