

# Resolved: To Do One Thing

Resolved 2023 - Pastor Jonathan Combs - December 31, 2023 - Philippians 3:13-14

**INTRO:** Good morning church! We are ending the year together and prayerfully considering how to start a new year with passion and purpose. As so many are doing right now, let us make some New Year's resolutions. However, unlike the rest of the world, we really only need to make one resolution and that one thing will change our lives and the world around us.

III: The idea of titling these New Year's sermons "Resolved" comes from a famous set of resolutions written by the prominent Great Awakening preacher Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was a man known for unwavering spiritual discipline, passionate speech, and for his prolific writing. He seemed driven by His singular devotion to God. In his famous resolutions he once wrote:

"Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can."

Today, we will be studying the mission statement of the apostle Paul who had this singular focus on following Jesus Christ. "This one thing I do," is the heart of his mission statement. As he writes in the Scripture just above our reading today, his singular focus was Christlikeness, a closeness and growing towards Jesus, "That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." (Phil. 3:10)

Need: How about you, do you have a singular focus? If you are anything like me and the majority of people around you then you are probably overwhelmed by a multiplicity of priorities. Wife, kids, friends, family, work, health, bills, school ... and the list goes on. Most of us have so many priorities that they are competing for our attention and maybe none get our best effort. Do you ever walk in a room and forget why you went in there? So many of us are living life this way, going from focus to focus with complete chaos in the mind.

Trans: What if we had one singular purpose as Christians? What if that one purpose could change everything?

**BODY:** In Philippians chapter 3, the apostle Paul encouraged the church in Philippi to make attaining Christlikeness their one priority just as he had. We can make attaining Christlikeness our one priority. How can we make Christlikeness our one priority? The text gives **three ways** to make Christlikeness our one priority.

Read text: Philippians 3:13-14 (ESV) But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

## HOW TO MAKE CHRISTLIKENESS OUR ONE PRIORITY:

### 1. Put aside the past.

EXP: **"One thing" (13)** (εἷς, eis) - one, only. This is Paul's sole purpose and sole obsession.

"Paul had one great aim and purpose of life. To this singleness of purpose he owed his uncommon success as a minister. A man will accomplish little who allows his mind to be distracted by a multiplicity of objects. A Christian will accomplish nothing who has not a single great aim and purpose of soul." (Barnes)

**"Forgetting" (13)** (ἐπιλανθάνομαι, epilanthanomai) (Middle voice) - to forget, neglecting, no longer caring for, given over to oblivion, uncared for, to lose out of mind. From the root word (λανθάνω, lathanō) which means to be hidden. To hide from oneself. Choose to put the past out of your mind, the good and the bad. I love how Ellicott puts it in his commentary:

"Past blessing is but an earnest of the future; past achievements of good are stepping-stones to greater things; past sins are viewed in that true repentance ... in having a sure and certain hope of the final conquest of all sin." (Ellicott)

There is careful wisdom in this statement. The past blessings and achievements are meant to build us up in hope and expectation. What God has done is meant to embolden us to take the next hill not to dwell there. Also, the past sin points us to future sanctification in true repentance not to be stuck in past failure.

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“**Lies behind**” (13) (ὀπίσω, opisō) - back, behind, after, afterwards; of place: things that are behind; of time: after

“When the Apostle says ‘Forgetting the things that are behind,’ he is thinking of the runner, who has no time to cast his eye over his shoulder to mark the steps already trod.” (MacLaren)

ARG: **Jesus taught that following Him meant keeping your eyes ahead not behind:**

Luke 9:61-62 (ESV) Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

**God has done amazing things, but is continually doing more and desires us to look ahead:**

Isaiah 43:18-19 (ESV) “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

ILL: Choose your illustration: (or use both ;))

1) In May 1954, Roger Bannister was the first man to ever run a mile in under four minutes. The very next month, Australian John Landy broke that record by 1.4 seconds. In August of that year these two runners met for the British Empire Games, a race being dubbed “The Miracle Mile.”

As Bannister and Landy turned for the last lap, Landy was ahead and looked certain to win, but as he neared the finishing line he lost focus and looked back over his shoulder, and as he did so his stride faltered and Bannister passed him to break the tape. Landy later said, “I would have won the race if I hadn’t looked back: if I hadn’t taken my eyes off the goal.”



2) In Genesis 19, God destroys the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because their behavior had become increasingly wicked and detestable. He does rescue one family, Abraham’s nephew Lot and his family. Before the destruction fell, two angels warned Lot, “Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away.” (Gen. 19:17)

Genesis 19:26 “But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” She is a character example of both obedience to God’s instruction as well as moving towards God’s goal not looking back.

APP: Will you choose to put aside the past? With wisdom you can remember the blessings and mercies of God so that they drive you to where God is leading you, but not cause you to linger there. By God’s grace you have been set free from sin, your past has been paid for by the blood of Jesus. Place your failings at His feet and move forward.

## 2. Pursue the next step.

EXP: “**Straining forward**” (13) (ἐπεκτείνωμαι, *epeteinomai*) (Middle voice) - to stretch out to or towards, to stretch (one’s self) forward to. Like a runner leaning towards the finish line.

“**Lie ahead**” (13) (ἐμπροσθεν, *emprosthen*) - in front, before, i.e. in that local region which is in front of a person or thing, in the presence of, in the sight of. Not a distant future but a destination that is in sight.

This is where the application of “next step” came from. God’s Word says to strain forward towards what lies in front of or in the sight of. There are other words that could have been used for the future or for some distant destination, but the Word says what lies ahead in the sight of. So set your focus on the next thing, the next step.

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ILL: Most of us are aware that any achievement in life requires a next step, but we don't often treat our spiritual lives with this type of metric:

"But the misery is that, though people know well enough that they cannot be good carpenters, or doctors, or fiddlers without certain habits and practices, they seem to fancy that they can be good Christians without them." (MacLaren)

Spiritually speaking, our goals are often vague, overly lofty, and boundless. We make goals like today's message, "I want to be more like Christ." That is lofty, vague and without any point of completion. We say things like, "I want to pray more, I want to know God or His Word better, I want to feel confident in talking to my loved ones about Jesus." These are goals that have no real means to accomplish them. We think they sound like faith language but in fact they are empty of effect.

Here is an acronym that works in business, in fitness, in relationships, and should be taken seriously in setting spiritual goals: **SMART** goals - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. Instead of "I want to pray more," I am going to spend in prayer first thing in the morning and last thing in the evening tomorrow or every day this week. That's my starting point for building prayerfulness.



ARG: **Treat your pursuit of Christ like a disciplined race:**

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (ESV) Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

APP: Set your life's purpose on growing in Christlikeness. Transform that lofty goal into next steps. Choose habits of daily prayer, of daily reading, of boldness in personal evangelism.

## 3. Persevere to the finish.

EXP: **"Press on"** (14) (διώκω, *diōkō*) - to make to run or flee, put to flight, drive away, to run swiftly in order to catch a person or thing, to run after; to press on: figuratively of one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal; metaph., to pursue, to seek after eagerly, earnestly endeavor to acquire.

**"Goal"** (14) (σκοπός, *skopos*) - the distant mark looked at, the goal or end one has in view.

**"Prize"** (14) (βραβεῖον, *brabeion*) - the award to the victor in the games, a prize; metaph. of the heavenly reward for Christian character

**"Upward call"** (14) (κλήσις, *klēsis*) - upwards, above, on high; calling, calling to, a call, invitation. "The calling of the Christian is from heaven, and to heaven" (Barnes) There is a finish line for the Christian and it's not retirement. Yes, we may in good conscience retire from work, but we never retire from ministry. Our finish line is God's calling us home or coming again and taking us home. Until then we run with perseverance

"He lived for the day when the heavenward call would come, like a victory in a race. Rather than slack off, as some were prone to do, the thought of it motivated him to further purity and service." (Melick, NAC: Philippians)

ARG: **Be strengthened in the Lord and don't grow tired of His work in your life:**

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Galatians 6:9 (ESV) And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

## Run hard to the finish for the applause of One:

2 Timothy 4:7-8 (ESV) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

ILL: Twelve scouts went into the promised land and only two came back with the faith that God could deliver on His promise of giving the land to His people, the two were Joshua and Caleb. Caleb remained a man of faith and hope in God's promises. Like so many of the saints of old, Caleb took steps of faith and courage until his dying breath:

Joshua 14:10-12 (ESV) 10 And now, behold, the Lord has kept me alive, just as he said, these forty-five years since the time that the Lord spoke this word to Moses, while Israel walked in the wilderness. And now, behold, I am this day eighty-five years old. 11 I am still as strong today as I was in the day that Moses sent me; my strength now is as my strength was then, for war and for going and coming. 12 So now give me this hill country of which the Lord spoke on that day, for you heard on that day how the Anakim were there, with great fortified cities. It may be that the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out just as the Lord said."

APP: Will you persevere until the finish line? Be encouraged in the Lord and move towards the next step that God has put before you. Do not fade in your older years, but abide in your Savior and let Him stir you up to good works.

**CONCLUSION:** Have you been overwhelmed by a variety of focuses that lead you in a thousand directions? Would you like to have a singular priority that reorients all of your life objectives under one life-giving, God-ordained banner? This one thing I do ... I pursue Jesus with all my heart. Make Christlikeness your one priority by:

- Putting aside your past.
- Pursuing your next God-given step.
- Persevering until Christ returns or calls you home.

Let's pray.