

"PRESS ON"
Philippians 3:12-16

Now with what I am about to say I know that for many of you, if the rolls would be reversed, you might say something similar. As a matter of fact I know some of you would and some might try to kindly rub it in my face. And if you did, I would totally understand based on loyalty and commitment and the years of rivalry. And I hope I don't offend anyone and yes, what I am about to say is sports related and so if you are not a sports person and you have difficulties with sports illustrations being brought into a sermon you can either, 1) tune me out right now; 2) listen to what I am about to say; or 3) not like it and as someone once said, "get a ladder and get over it." So here goes- do you realize that for the last 12 quarters of Cleveland Browns football- and for you non-sports fans, 12 quarters equal 3 full games- for the last 12 quarters which takes in the last two games from last year and the first pre-season game this year the Brownies have yet to score any, I mean any points?

Now if this goes on any longer there will be some louder wailing and gnashing of teeth, but if you are a die-hard Browns fan you will do some moaning and groaning and hang in there with the team. And if there is one thing I would say to the Cleveland Brown players and fans it would be, "don't give up, don't lose sight of the goal or even the goal post for a field goal and press on." And believe me, if the Steelers were in the same predicament I know, I know I would be hearing it.

There was once a little boy who went out to the baseball field all by himself. He was wearing his baseball cap and carrying his bat and ball. He had determination written all over his face. He was filled with confidence as he put the bat on his shoulder, tossed the ball into the air, and said, "I'm the greatest batter in the world." But he swung and missed. "Strike one," he shouted. He picked up the ball, looked it over, and threw it into the air again. And as he watched the ball descend, he repeated, "I'm the greatest batter in the world." But again he missed.

“Strike two,” he shouted, but with a puzzled look on his face. And so he stopped and examined the bat to make sure there was no hole in it. A third time he picked up the ball, adjusted his cap, and tossed the ball into the air. As the ball went up a third time he said again, “I’m the greatest batter in the world.” He swung with all his might, but he missed for the third time.

“Strike three. Y’er out,” he said just like an umpire would do. But this little guy, instead of being discouraged, he began to jump up and down and run across the ball field, shouting, “Wow! What a pitcher. I’m the greatest pitcher in the world.”

Let me ask you- how has life been treating you recently? Some good days, some bad days? These have been difficult days for so many people- people facing difficulties with employment; economic issues; relational issues; people making bad choices, bad decisions; people are divided over so many issues that are being played out in our society like health care reform, immigration, and ones that get’s played out big-time not only in the

society and the church- like abortion and homosexuality and the list can go on. And there are some people who just can't seem to score; they get the ball up to the one yard line and they just can't punch the ball over the goal and they are stuck or they just seem to keep striking out.

But guess what? We have all struck out at one time or another and in one area or another. We have all had disappointment and sorrow. We have all felt the agony of defeat, even though some have felt it more severe and intense than others. We have made mistakes that just might continue to haunt us to this day. Now I am not trying to preach a downer sermon, I am just stating, as sergeant Friday in an old police television show, *Dragnet* from the 1950's used to say, "just the facts, ma'am."

So the question is, how do we move forward when life seems to be pulling us back? How do we pick up the pieces to a broken life and breathe new life into a deflated, dejected body?

Four points I want to make today- First, **know who you are and become what you are.** Paul says in vs. 12 that Christ Jesus has made him, Paul his own; did you catch that- His own. Two Sundays ago we talked about the fact that Paul passionately had set before the church in Philippi what really mattered to him. Go back to Philippians 3:7-8 and 10 where Paul writes (vs. 7-8), "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (vs. 10) I want to know Christ,...." The most important thing for Paul was knowing Christ Jesus, and he wants the believer to have the same desire, the same passion, the same importance in life. But look again at what he says in verse 12, because this is crucial and one that we need to return to and ponder often, often. And verse 12 is a tremendous, an explosive disclaimer for he says, "Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached

the goal.” Did you catch this verse? Paul is trying to get the word out, “I am a work in progress, I haven’t arrived yet, I am on a journey.”

You see there were those who were going to read his letter to the Philippians that believed, that they had come to the conclusion that they had arrived at perfection. Scholars tell us that there was a group in the church that believed that their baptism was an initiation into a state of perfection to which nothing needed to be added. And so Paul steps up to the plate and says, “I strike out;” “Not that I have already obtained” perfection; “it is a process that will take a lifetime to complete.” And this process of growth is where we seek to press on to make “it”- the fullness that Christ has given me, my own. And what Paul is saying is “hey folks, we ARE Christians and we must now BECOME what we claim to be, what we are- Christians. We are saved so now we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling- and he told us that back in Philippians 2:12.

Folks, **we live in tension**. For the believer in Christ, we have “died with Christ” to sin, and yet we are still sinners. We have been washed by the blood of Christ and we have been declared “righteous” and God has accepted us by our faith in Christ, but guess what? We are unrighteous, we are broken, sinful people and any, I mean any claim we make to any righteousness is, as Isaiah says in Isaiah 64:6, “as filthy rags.” And that is our tension, a creative tension, if you will. And it is the personal relationship with Christ who has made us His own and the pulls and tugs of this world that creates this tension. And there are times, let’s be honest, when the pull to Christ wins and the pull to the world wins. But the great thing is when and if the world wins it doesn’t have to be final. Just read your Bible and see how many great Biblical characters fell victim to sin and the world- the screwed up too. They screwed up but the key was “Getting Up” and starting over. If failures were not included in the Bible there would be no one there. And if failures were not included in the church no one would be here either.

And the Good News is that the Bible tells us that failure and falling and sin doesn't have to be final all because of WHO and WHAT we are. We are new people in Christ and every day we start where we are proclaiming with boldness and confidence that Christ has made us new creatures, and yet confessing that we have NOT become in fullness what Christ desires us to be. We cannot claim perfection but we can rest assured that Christ Jesus has made us His own.

Second, **leave the past behind**. Paul says in vs. 13, "forgetting what lies behind...." I know that for some people this is one of their biggest hurdles in life and yet one that must be jumped if they want to move forward to find some sense of peace and worth and healing. I know from my own life experiences. We might give our sin, our issue, our mistake, what we are wrestling with to God, really wanting Him to have it but we somehow don't trust Him enough to give us the help we need; we don't believe God will forgive us or love us enough or want to erase it from His

ledger where we have Him keeping score- our score. And yet God says in Psalm 103:12, "as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions [our sins] from us." Over, past, gone, caput. We have to, we got to leave the past behind because if we don't it will haunt us, it will rob us of freedom, it will make us broken and heavy-hearted, it will hinder us from being able to use all our spiritual energy and gifts that God has given to us for coping with the new and moving forward into the future with joy. Friends, leave the past behind and if need be, write down the things you need to leave behind on a piece of paper start a little fire in the fire place or somewhere safe and burn the paper and watch them burn up into ashes and throw away the ashes and walk away leaving them for good.

Third, **establish a goal**. We have to know where we want to go, we have to set goals that we are moving towards. We can't stay stagnant or we will shrivel up and die. For Paul, he wanted to encourage the people he was writing to press on, to live life to the fullest for Christ, to continue to grow

and mature in the faith. And hasn't that been the challenge for the Church ever since the beginning? To challenge people to grow more and more in love with Jesus, to grow more and more in their faith so that they can be productive, faithful followers of Jesus Christ who are serving and ministering in His name? But it takes a "stick-to-it-ness," it takes keeping your eyes on the goal and not giving up and not giving in.

I read this story the other day that I want to share with you about setting a goal and not giving up. It is a true story about an evangelist who loved to hunt. Well the man bought two setter pups that were topnotch bird dogs. He kept them in his backyard, where he trained them. One morning, an ornery, little vicious looking bulldog came shuffling and snorting down the alley. He crawled under the fence into the backyard where the setters spent their days. It was easy to see he meant business. The evangelist's first impulse was to take his setters and lock them in the basement so they wouldn't tear up the little bulldog. But he decided to let the creature learn a

lesson he would never forget. Naturally, they got into a scuffle and those two setters and that bulldog went round and round! The bulldog finally had enough and he squeezed under the fence and took off. All the rest of the day he whined and licked his sores. But the next day, around the same time, there he was again ornery as ever- back under the fence and after those two setters. And again those two bird dogs beat the crap out of that little bowlegged animal and would have chewed him up if he hadn't, exited, stage left and got out of the backyard. And wouldn't you believe it, the very next day he was back again. Same time, same results. And again, he got the stuffing beaten out of him and he crawled back under the fence to find his way home and lick his wounds. Well the evangelist had to go on the road for a revival meeting and was gone for several weeks. When he came back he asked his wife what happened. Shoe said, "Honey, you just won't believe what's happened. Every day, at the same time every morning, that little bulldog came back in the backyard and fought with our two setters.

He didn't miss a day! And I want you to know it has come to the point that when our setters simply hear that bulldog snorting down the alley and spot him squeezing under the fence, they immediately start whining and run down into our basement. That little, old bulldog struts around our backyard now just like he owns it. – Charles R. Swindoll, *Living the Level of Mediocrity*

Friends, be a bulldog, set your goal and, with the help of Christ, go after it and be victorious over whatever it is your are trying to overcome, whatever it is you are trying to beat, whatever it is you are trying to succeed in and especially when it comes to matters of faith and maturing and spiritual growth.

And the final point is this, **stay focused**. It is so easy to get distracted or be distracted when it comes to trying to reach the goal, the spiritual goal of knowing Christ in all its fullness and richness. And so Paul would tell us to run the race with our eyes wide open, focusing on the course and the steps we take.

I leave you with the address that Sir Winston Churchill gave at Harrow School on October 29, 1941. This is what, this is all he said, "Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never- in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never give in." Then he sat down. – Winston Churchill And Paul says, "Press on."

Amen.

"PRESS ON"
Philippians 3:12-16

Introduction: As of 8/22 at 7:30 p.m. the last 12 quarters of football...

How has life been treating you recently?

These have been difficult days for so many people...

We have all struck out... We have all had disappointment and sorrow.... How do we move forward when life seems to be pulling us back? How do we pick up the pieces....?

Four points

First, **know** _____ **you are and become** _____ **you are**
Phil. 3:7-8, 10

We ARE Christians and we must now BECOME what we claim to be

We live in tension

Second, **leave the past** _____ vs. 13
This is one of the biggest hurdles in life

Psalm 103:12

Third, **establish a** _____

It takes "stick-to-it-ness"

The story of the two setter pups and the bulldog

Fourth, **stay** _____

Conclusion: Sir Winston Churchill's address at Harrow School on October 29, 1941