

Stretch

The Press

Philippians 3:12-21--January 19, 2020

Okay, so we've been spending the first couple of weeks of 2020 talking about getting ourselves into spiritual shape for this new year. We said that if we're going to spend this year getting into shape, then the first thing we need to do is stretch. We need to get loosened up and ready for the spiritual workout God has for each of us. We mentioned that because each of us is different that each of our spiritual workout plans will look different. No two will look the same because each of us comes with our own set of unique experiences, and families of origin, and religious backgrounds.

We did say that all of us have to get started and that this is not a "jumping into the deep end" kind of thing because those don't work; and they definitely don't last. We also said that this might cause us to make some adjustments in our daily lives, our entertainment choices, our food habits or even our relationships. Those things will reveal themselves as we walk through the exercises, right. This is not an easy, overnight kind of thing. If it was, everyone would have a phenomenal spiritual life, right. But, as we've all heard, no pain, no gain.

So, today is the third installment in this series and I just want to say one key phrase...press on. When we hear that phrase, we automatically go to some image in our minds right. Maybe it's the guy trying to get to the top of [Pic of Sherpa] Mt Everest with the pack and all the gear and the oxygen. Or maybe it's the [Pic of runner] marathon runner who hits the wall at around mile 17 and needs to push through it. Or maybe it's the [Pic of yelling parent] Mom who is arguing with a child for the umpteenth time and she just needs to stay the course so that this child turns out right. Or maybe it's cancer patient who has 10 treatments down and 20 more to go. When the Apostle Paul used that term 2000 years ago when he was addressing the believers in Philippi he had been bruised, beaten, jailed, rejected, turned out and questioned, criticized and ostracized, forlorn, abandoned, and downright feared by those who had become believers.

So, when this guy is saying "press on" he means [pic of pushing the ball up the hill] pushing the ball up hill everyday through all kinds of obstacles and struggles. He is saying to us that no matter what happens, I am going to press on because what I'm after is worth it. Listen again to how he says it: ***I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. ¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.***

Take a moment and think about some of the things that you have gained through perseverance. What do you have today that came to you because you stayed the course? Is it the degree that you got? Is it the job you have? Is it the relationship you've always wanted? Is it the house that you dreamed about? Is it a place in your personal health? Is it a goal reached, a summit you peaked, a milestone you made it to, a battle won? What has perseverance brought you to? At some point, you thought, maybe even believed that the goal was worth it. Whatever it was that was the object of pursuit it was given enough value for you and maybe the people around you, to be willing to sacrifice. And whether you believed it was possible or not, you hung in there and made it a reality.

As all of us are challenged to stretch our spiritual lives into this new year it is time we stretch and get ready to step into a time of perseverance that will bring us to the goal. You are being asked by God to step up and make a new commitment to living the life of a believer in the savior of the world. **God asks all of us to commit to living the life of a believer.** This is no casual commitment or weekend warrior kind of thing. This is all out, give it everything I've got to reach the goal that is set before me by Jesus.

There are three levels of goals for each of us. There are short term goals that we all set for ourselves. These can be the things that take a short burst of energy to attain a win. These are the things we can do that can be as short as three days or three months. They can be the things that we can do easily allow us to kind of put our foot in the water. It's the 5-pound weights, 10 times for three repetitions. Short term goals can also be those things that offer huge, immediate results. **Short term goals are important because we all need a win** early in the process to let us know that we can do this and that we can keep going.

Then there are long term goals that we all have. These are the ones that we will need a whole lot more "pressing on" if we're going to hit these goals. These are things like a two-year degree that's going to take four years and night classes.

Or maybe it's the five years it's going to take to paydown my debt using a snowballing method. Or maybe it's adjusting my eating habits so that I don't just loose a few pounds but, I keep them off and feel healthier in the long run. **Long term goals create lifelong habits.** A long term goals can be to learn enough to be able to teach or lead others, to grow my knowledge base to be able to move to the next level, commit to something for the amount of time it's going to take to see real change or just stay with what works instead of giving up or giving in. Every week there are several groups who exercise here at the church. There are aerobic groups, volleyball games, Zumba groups...and they meet weekly and have been for years – because it's become a part of their lifestyle.

And then there are eternal goals that every person should establish. These are the ones that affect the way we treat others, the way we use money, the depth of our relationships, how much time we put into prayer and Bible reading, how we invest in our faith, what we believe about the eternal security of the people we love and the people we interact with each day. **Eternal goals create spiritual habits.** If our goal, like the Apostle Paul who is writing to the church at Philippi, is to get to heaven then we need to develop habits that will help keep us on the path. Obviously, he is saying that this is a journey and that he hasn't reached the end yet when he says: ***12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection.*** Instead he is reminding us that none of us is finished until we take our last breath. God is not done working on you and me until that moment when – as it says in the passage from Philippians: ***21 He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.*** Until that day when we reach eternity there are things we need to be working on and working out.

Now you can see why we need to stretch...there's a daily work out for each of us to step into and there are days when we're just not in the spiritual shape we need to be in so, we need to stretch it out. We need to expand our spiritual capacity so that the things that happen to us physically and/or emotionally do not send us into a spiritual tailspin. Look, you are a triune being. You are physical, emotional, and spiritual being...all three wrapped up into one person. This is because we are created in the image of God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, right. So, in your life, when one of those three – physical, emotional or spiritual – is out of whack, it affects the other two. It's like one of those three-legged milking stools they used to have out in the barn. You get one of those caught or loose and it messes up the whole thing, right.

There are some of us here this morning who are a bit messy in their physical or emotional lives because their spiritual life is underdeveloped or inadequate for the things that happen to us. Others of us here are questioning God because they don't understand something that's happening to their bodies and why God would allow that. For some of us in the room we are struggling with something that has us in an emotional state of turmoil and so we stop praying and start eating...not good, right. Does this make sense?

You see, some of us have neglected our spiritual lives and when we needed that third leg of support...it was too weak to be of any help. If you've never read the Bible, then it's hard to find comfort in the Words of God because you're unfamiliar with the book and you've never hear them spoken. If we don't work on our prayer lives when things are going well it will be hard to pray when if feel like the world if crashing in. If you've not gone to church much or gotten into a LifeGroup then the support those places can give will feel foreign.

So, it's time to stretch a bit...to get into some new habits that will help you be the person God believes you can be. So, what will you begin to do today that will stretch you a bit? Let me give you just a few ideas.

- Daily prayer
- Daily Bible reading
- Be nice to someone
- Go out of your way to do something for someone
- Call someone everyday
- Write a letter to a different person every day this week
- Visit someone you haven't seen in a while
- _____

We've also given you a list of opportunities that might help stretch you a bit. Take a look at the sheet that was given to you and see if there is somewhere you might be drawn to serve.

Whatever you do...start now. Make it a short-term goal that has the potential to become a long-term habit that will become an eternal decision.