Put On Your Running Shoes

*Philippians 3:12-16*

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**PATH**

We all can appreciate the disciplined runner who has trained long hours and has conditioned his/her body to reach its maximum potential. One of Paul’s favorite metaphors for Christian living was the race. In this passage, he pictured the believer as an athlete competing in a footrace pushing toward the finish line. To become winning champions in this race toward Christlikeness, Pastor Skip gave five essentials:

I. A Winner Needs Dissatisfaction (vv. 12a, 13a)  
IV. A Winner Needs Dedication (v. 14)

II. A Winner Needs Concentration (v. 13)  
V. A Winner Needs Collaboration (vv. 15-16)

III. A Winner Needs Direction (v. 13b)

**POINTS**

**A Winner Needs Dissatisfaction:**
- Paul was a sports fan: he used many sports analogies in his writings. Verses 12-16 describe an amazing race, calling us to put on our running shoes. We can think of our life as a race toward Christlikeness.
- Though Paul experienced power, he had a sanctified dissatisfaction. No one can reach perfection this side of heaven. Imperfection drives us onward: self-satisfaction is the biggest barrier to growth.
- If you compare your running with others, you slow down.
- A divine dissatisfaction is essential for spiritual progress.
- **Probe:** Discuss times when you felt satisfied and dissatisfied with your walk with Christ. What were the circumstances for both? How can you improve your run?

**A Winner Needs Concentration:**
- “One thing I do” (v. 13) is an important phrase that is used in several places in the New Testament. The point is that you are to act, do, and run.
- Winners are winners because they concentrate on one thing and let nothing distract them from it. One of the greatest problems in life is spreading yourself too thin to be effective.
- For Paul, his relationship with Christ was his main focus. The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.
- **Probe:** Discuss your priorities in life. Knowing that your relationship with Christ comes first, how would you prioritize the rest of the things in your life? What is your life like when your priorities get mixed up?

**A Winner Needs Direction:**
- Pastor and theologian Eugene Peterson described discipleship as “a long obedience in the same direction.” We can add that it’s a long obedience in the right direction.
- Paul said he was “reaching forward” (v. 13). To be effective in the present, you must let go of the past.
- In the Bible, to forget isn’t failing to remember; it’s not allowing the past to influence the present.
- If you want to be miserable, live life looking over your shoulder.
- **Probe:** Why is it important to not dwell on the past—either your failures or achievements? Why should all Christians continually reach forward toward the prize in Christ?

**A Winner Needs Dedication:**
- The idea of pressing on is to exert, giving every fiber of your body and strength to succeed in your spiritual run.
- No one becomes a winning athlete just by listening, but through practice and training.
- **Probe:** As Pastor Skip asked, what would the outcome be if you put as much dedication into your spiritual life as you do the peripheral things of life? What are some areas of your spiritual life to which you can dedicate more time (Bible study, prayer, service, etc.)?

**A Winner Needs Collaboration:**
- Though some in church teach sinless perfection (that a Christian in this life can live perfectly), the Bible doesn’t teach this. But the Bible does not want us to be apathetic, either. To bring balance, Paul encouraged us to run at our own pace.
- Think about this truth: runners do better in packs—with other runners.
- Most Americans watch sports, but the challenge is to participate, to get in the race.
- Put on your running shoes and either get in the race or get back on track.
- **Probe:** If you have a favorite sport, what is it? What are some of the qualities of a good athlete? How can you mimic some of those qualities in your spiritual life?

**PRACTICE**

**Connect Up:** God created you as a unified person made of physical (mind/body) and spiritual parts (spirit/soul). How can you train your entire body to run your race well? Consider the following:
- **Spiritual:** Bible study, prayer, fellowship, communion, and evangelism (see Acts 2:40-47)
- **Physical:** Eat right (see 1 Corinthians 10:31), exercise (see 1 Timothy 4:8), and empathize (have compassion)

**Connect In:** Running with others in your spiritual race will help you enjoy the run more. Enjoy the company God has given you because your outlook will help sharpen your in-look. Put another way, the way you view life will influence the way you value life. Your attitude is important. Discuss the role attitude has in your relationships. Why is having a healthy attitude essential to running a good race with fellow Christians?

**Connect Out:** To empathize is to understand and sympathize with others. There are two types of empathy: cognitive and affective. **Cognitive empathy** is the ability to identify what others think and/or feel. **Affective empathy** is the ability to respond appropriately. Bibliically, empathy plays out as compassion, servanthood, mercy, and most importantly, love. How can empathy help us run a better race, particularly when serving people and sharing the gospel?