ONE THING

"But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.", (Phil 3:13-14)

Perhaps you have heard the old proverb: "He who chases two rabbits catches neither". This is true! The hunter must have focus in order to be successful. For a bird in flight there is safety in numbers. While a hawk can easily focus on a single victim, hundreds of victims can be distracting. This simple fact is used by the military. When an airplane is under attack by a missile, it can drop hundreds of targets called "chaff". These many targets can often distract the missile and save the airplane. In 2011, 23% of all automobile wrecks involved cell phones (That's 1.3 million crashes). Distractions can be deadly when you are driving. At the recent Olympics (2016), Australian swimmer Emily Seebohm was a heavy favorite to win the gold in the 100-meter backstroke. She didn't! She later explained that she "messed up" because she stayed up too long the night before responding to messages of encouragement on Twitter and Facebook. Even minor distractions can sometimes dilute our effectiveness. Success often involves the ability to focus on "one thing".

The spiritual application of this principle should be obvious. Paul wanted to win the race of life, and he did so by focusing on only one thing.. He successfully finished the race, kept the faith, and has now received a crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:6 - 8). This crown, he explains, was not just for him, but also for "all who have longed for His appearing". Paul's goal was to please Christ and he did everything he could to avoid any distractions. We should do the same!

First, he forgot what was behind. Some of the things "behind" were negative, and some were positive. He forgot them both. The man looking back over his should cannot plow a straight furrow (Lk. 9:62). At Lystra, for example, Paul was stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19). Imagine how distracting this memory would be if he though about it every time he stood up to preach. That's why he forgot it. At Ephesus, by contrast, Paul had such success that in only two years everybody in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10). He forgot this too! Success in the present demands that we focus on today's race, not yesterdays victory or defeat.

The Greek word "ekteino" means to stretch out. When Jesus met a man with a withered hand, He commanded him "stretch out your hand" (Mk. 3:5). The word translated in our text as "straining toward" is "epekteino" which is an intensive form of "ekteino". Paul was not just "stretching out", he was "straining". Remember! The Christian life is not a "stroll" it is a race!

Matthew tells us of a man who wanted to follow Jesus, but "first" wanted to go and bury his father (Matt. 8:21). While it is generally assumed that the man's father was still living, the need for establishing priorities is crystal clear. We are to seek "first" His Kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). It is a mistake to assume that putting Christ "first", however, requires us to neglect our families. Exactly the reverse is true. **"If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. " (1 Tim 5:8)** The point is that when we focus on the goal of pleasing Christ, whatever we do in word or deed becomes an act of worship unto the Lord (Col. 3:17). Even mundane activities like eating, for example, should be done "unto the Lord" (Rom. 14:6).

Paradoxically, this "slavery" to Christ actually produces freedom. Christ came to "proclaim freedom for the prisoners" (Lk. 4:18). It is a "glorious freedom" (Rom. 8:21), for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor. 3:17). "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1), "But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature" (Gal 5:13)

If pleasing Christ is the one and only thing you do in this life, you will never regret it!