

UP!
Philippians 3:12-14

INTRODUCTION:

Disney/Pixar animated films has released another movie destined to become a classic: “Up!”. That’s it. That’s the title: “Up!”.

The movie is a comedy adventure about 78-year-old balloon salesman, Carl Fredrickson, who finally fulfills his lifelong dream of a great adventure when he ties thousands of balloons to his house and flies away to the wilds of South America.

Carl dreamed of great adventure and his dreams led him “Up”. Do you have any dreams left? Is there still a spark of adventure in your soul? Today, I hope to give definition to your dream and fan your spark into flame.

Please take your Bible and turn to Philippians chapter 3.

3 *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.*

² *Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.* ³ *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—* ⁴ *though I myself have reasons for such confidence.*

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ *circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;* ⁶ *as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.*

⁷ *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.*

⁸ *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ* ⁹ *and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.* ¹⁰ *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,* ¹¹ *and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

¹² *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold*

of me. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

When scholars translate the Bible, they sometimes have to interpret what thoughts the words were intended to convey. For instance, in verse 14 above, the Greek text literally reads:

*“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the **up call** of God in Christ Jesus.”*

So let me ask again: Do you have any dreams left? Is there still a spark of adventure in your soul? How about a quest that is worth the investment of your life? How about a venture that will energize your life, challenge your abilities and realize your full potential?

I suggest you look at the goal that had grabbed hold of the apostle Paul and consider making it your own.

I. AN HONEST ADMISSION – *“I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.”*

When Paul wrote to the Christians in the city of Philippi, he warned them not to place their hope of heaven in the flesh: that is, not in what they can accomplish by their own efforts.

Paul asserted that if anyone had a right to be boastful about who he was and what he had accomplished, he, Paul, had such a right. He had, after all, been raised to be a scrupulously observant Jew.

- He was circumcised on the eighth day, just as The Law specifies.
- He had an unbroken bloodline that traced back to Abraham.
- He was of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was the son of Jacob’s favorite and beloved wife, Rachel. King Saul, Israel’s first king, was of the little tribe of Benjamin. It was a mark of distinction for Paul to be able to say that he was of the tribe of Benjamin.
- In regards to keeping every last detail of The Law, Paul asserted that he was a Pharisee: the most meticulously obedient of the Jews.
- As to zeal or passion, consider this: he even persecuted the church.
- As regards to being righteous as defined by The Law, Paul said he was faultless. Now how many of us could claim that we have kept every command, every rule and every regulation in the Bible? Paul said that with reference to The Law, he was faultless. **FAULTLESS!**

But in spite of all of the accomplishments, achievements and accolades in Paul’s life, he had to acknowledge that he had not yet achieved his goal. He had not yet taken hold of the goal that had got hold of him.

The goal, the mission, the quest is to attain a righteousness that is not earned by keeping rules but rather the righteousness that is accepted as a gift from God.

This term, “righteousness”, figures prominently in Paul’s letters. Righteousness is not a word that we hear or use very often so let me just explain that, in the Greek, it comes from the same root as the word “just” or “justice”. A righteous person is one who keeps the law and is, therefore, an innocent person before the law.

Paul knew The Law very well. He was an expert on The Law. He knew it so well that he knew he was not an innocent man. If God, the Judge of the universe, were to review Paul’s record and hand down a verdict, Paul knew he would be judged “guilty”. Not only that, Paul knew that there was nothing he could do to expunge his record. Paul also knew that the penalty for sin is death so he knew that, before God, he was a condemned man.

But one day, Paul heard some very good news: someone else had served his sentence. He didn’t have to try to be good enough to satisfy God. Someone else already did that for him. Now all that was left was for Paul to come to really know Christ, to establish a relationship with him and to live immersed in him.

Paul admits, however, that he is not there yet. He has a ways to go to be one with Jesus. That is his honest admission. And isn’t it an honest admission you would have to make, too? You aren’t as close to Jesus, as intimate with him as you ought to be, are you? None of us are.

II. **A HEARTY ATTEMPT – “*But one thing I do*”**

Having admitted that he is not yet as close to Jesus as he ought to be, Paul has to decide how to respond to that fact. He could give up and find another goal for which to live. Or he can recommit himself to reaching his goal. And that is what Paul does. He recommits himself to reach his goal.

“*But one thing I do...*” That is a single-minded, whole-hearted, total-soul commitment to a solitary purpose.

Oh, how much more we could all accomplish if we were to dedicate ourselves to one worthy goal. Most of us dissipate our effectiveness because we spread ourselves too thin and fail to commit our lives to a specific significant purpose.

Is it true for you? Have you dabbled in many things, some of them unworthy of your best efforts? Have you ever pledged yourself completely

to something noble, heroic and glorious? Wouldn't you like to while you still can?

In a few minutes, we are going to sing a hymn of invitation and it will be your opportunity to accept the challenge to make your life count by offering it up for one lofty purpose.

Ah, but that's the rub, isn't it? What is a lofty purpose? What is a worthy goal? What is a life's ambition that deserves your life? Paul shares his.

III. A HOLY ASPIRATION – “I press on toward the goal to win the prize”

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. 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.

One thing I do, I press on toward the goal to win the prize. That is the noble calling, the lofty purpose, the worthy goal, the heroic quest, the glorious objective. Paul's holy aspiration is, when the time comes, for God to call him home to heaven. In a word, for God to call him “Up!”.

To press on toward the goal, Paul acknowledges that he must forget about the things that are behind. His achievements and his accolades, his faults and his failures, his hurts and his heartaches, his triumphs and his tragedies...Paul had to put all of that behind him so he could press on toward the goal.

And what about you? What do you need to put behind you? What do you need to get beyond so you can press on toward the goal of being one with Jesus?

- Do you have some hurts you need to get over so you can become one with Christ?
- Do you have some mistakes you need to move beyond so you can get close to Jesus?
- Maybe you have been basking in the glow of yesterday's success. But to live your life with your gaze firmly fixed on your rearview mirror is certainly to court disaster. To what do you look forward?

This week, on one of the internet news services, I read the sad story of Brooke Greenberg who lives in Maryland. At 16-years-old, Brooke weighs 16 pounds and stands 2 feet, 6 inches tall. She can't speak, but she can express frustration and happiness. In other words, Brooke's body and mind are that of a toddler and doctors don't know why.

Isn't that about the saddest thing you have ever heard: a young woman who is a perpetual baby. But my, my; I've known so many people who

have remained spiritual babes for decades...some for their entire lives...because they won't let go of the past so they can take hold of the future.

None of us are any different than Paul. To achieve the goal of the upward call of God, we need to forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead. Like a runner leaning toward the tape and exerting his last ounce of strength to reach the goal, Christians must hold nothing back as we press on to reach the goal.

CONCLUSION:

The prize of which Paul wrote was the goal that defined his life: the upward call of God. Carl Fredricksen is a fictional character with a fantasy goal. The apostle Paul is a historic figure with a heroic quest.

You, too, are a real person and you can devote your life to trivial pursuits or to an adventure that is bigger than you are. Will you take the challenge to live for the call? It is a call to aspire to new heights, to walk on a higher plane, to live above the world and ultimately, to stand on higher ground. Are you up to it?

INVITATION: #549 – *“Higher Ground”*