

**Lexington Presbyterian Church**  
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*A Winning Attitude*  
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My children were and are still very competitive individuals. They come by it naturally as I am competitive as well. When Anna Gray and Thomas (they are twins who are now 33) first began playing sports we were living in Mandeville, LA. My experience then and I suspect is probably just as true today, is that the parents want to win with a greater passion than do the children.

One thing that I tried to instill in all of my children when they were growing up is that a winning attitude is being able to lose gracefully. Now, I have to admit, I do not like to lose. But I also realize that you cannot win every game, match, or competition.

When Paul writes this letter to the Philippians he does so from prison in order for him to stay connected to the church there while incarcerated. He gives wise counsel to the church then and today.

First, Paul encourages the Philippians to focus on the future. (Philippians 3:12-14) He writes: *“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. Brothers and sisters, 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.”*

Paul confessed that he had not yet arrived in his Christian life. “He had not become perfect.” As long as we live in a human body we will be limited by this body. In the power of the Holy Spirit you can have perfect love and perfect motives, but we will not achieve perfection until we reach God’s heavenly kingdom. In this life we will lack some wisdom, some strength, and make mistakes.

Here is a great lesson we can learn from Paul. He forgets all his past accomplishments and presses on toward the future. Prior to his transformation experience on the Damascus Road when he saw the risen Christ, he pursued Christians with a passion to put them in jail and cause havoc in the church. Now with that same passion he pursues Jesus Christ.

When we surrender our life to Jesus it is only the beginning. It is like stepping on the first step on a long stair case. The stairs are not an escalator that carries you up without any effort. You have to move up step by step.

Christians in the early church practiced basic spiritual disciplines to maintain spiritual health and growth. (Acts 2:42-27): The early Christians devoted themselves to: the Apostles Teaching, to worship, prayer, and Christian fellowship. As a consequence the Lord added new believers to the church day by day.

## Philippians 4: 4-9

To focus on the future means that we do as Paul practiced in his life: “Forgetting what is behind, and straining toward what is ahead.” And Paul had much to forget. He could have lived with regret his entire life. He regretted leading in the stoning of Stephen, a devout follower of Jesus. He regretted causing havoc to the church of Jesus Christ.

It’s interesting that when we are driving in the car, the windshield is much larger than the rearview mirror. When we look at what is behind through the rearview mirror it is a limited area. But, as we travel forward and look through the windshield, the area in which we see is much broader, more expansive.

In this period of transition between called and installed pastors, it is important for us to focus on the future. Some questions that we will explore in the next few months ahead are; What do you hope will be the most striking difference about the church in the next 5 years? Five years from now what will the church’s members consider the most important legacy of our current church membership? What is God doing in the world and how can we be a part of that? And there will be many others that we’ll seek to answer.

By the grace and love of God, Paul could testify that he was forgetting all that was past.

It is only by the grace and mercy of God that we can forget the past. We may have had experiences in the past that have caused us deep hurts. Some of us have experienced injustices, bitterness, hatred, and rejection by those we love. The healing of memories only comes from the grace and love of God.

To dwell on the past or focus on the future is up to us. It is a choice we make. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul was motivated to leave behind the past and press toward the prize; the prize of knowing Christ.

Paul declared that people with a winning attitude first focus their lives on the future.

Second, a person with a winning attitude is one that has a servant’s heart.

Paul encourages each of us when he writes: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.” Jesus is our model and example.

Jesus humbled himself. Jesus did not have his beginning in a lowly manger. Jesus existed before this world and universe were created. Jesus humbled himself and took on human form with flesh and blood. He felt pain, anger and sorrow. Jesus said: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11).

Jesus served others. Jesus said he did not come to earth to be served but to serve others. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus did not come as a superstar. He came as a carpenter.

Jesus encouraged others to lead. From the beginning of his public ministry Jesus developed a team ministry. He chose 12 disciples to become part of his ministry team.

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Gene Wilkes, in his book, *Jesus on Leadership*, writes, “*Jesus did not come to gain a place of power. He did not come to defeat his human enemies. He did not come to overthrow an unjust government. Jesus came to show us the heart of God. His entire message and ministry on earth was to show selfish, power-hungry people what love looks like. As he knelt before Judas, Jesus showed us a love that no human can conceive on his own: a love that is brutally honest about what is going on but still kneels before us to lay down his life so we can be free from the sin that infects us. Jesus loves you as he loved Judas. If you miss that, you have missed eternal life*” (p. 168).

According to Paul the way to a winning attitude is to focus on the future, to live with a servant’s heart, and third, practice the praise principle.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

Paul practiced the praise principle even when confined to prison. He looked beyond his confinement, beyond lonely nights, and beyond hardships. He said to the Christians in Philippi praying for him: “Do not feel sad for me. Praise the Lord because what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. The Roman guards have heard the good news of the Gospel. Jesus is changing lives” (Phil. 1:12-14).

Do you think Paul ever got discouraged? Sure he did. While confined to prison Paul mentions many friends that came to him and gave him comfort and encouragement. His friends kept him encouraged in his service for the Lord. The best leaders have times of discouragement. The key is to not stay down in despair.

The story is told of a farmer who had a mule that accidentally fell into a deep well on his farm. The farmer tried everything he could to get his mule out. Finally he decided to bury the mule. He dumped a truckload of dirt on the mule. Dust began to fly and the mule stomped and snorted until he was on top of the dirt pile. After a few more truckloads of dirt the mule rose triumphantly to the top and walked out.

When life kicks you let it kick you upward and forward.

So, how do we practice the praise principle?

“Practice giving thanks in every circumstance for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thess. 5:18).

Try practicing saying positive words to everyone you meet? I am guilty of not doing this. Positive words build people up and create a loving, positive atmosphere. When we speak critical, negative words we create suspicion, mistrust and an attitude of failure. “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries the bones” (Proverbs 17:22).

A small business man was threatened to go out of business. A national chain store had moved in and acquired all the properties on his block. This small businessman refused to sell. The national chain attorneys said he would be sorry because the new large store would build all around him and

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put him out of business. The day came when the small merchant found himself hemmed in with a new department store stretching out on both sides of his little retail shop. The competitors' banners announced, "Grand Opening!" The merchant countered with his own banner stretching across the entire width of his store. It read: "Main Entrance."

When you are surrounded by positive people you can turn obstacles into opportunities. Paul surrounded himself with a team of positive people; therefore he could write: "*We are pressed on every side by troubles, but not crushed and broken. We are perplexed because we do not know why things happen as they do, but we don't give up and quit. We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going*" (2 Corinthians 4:8,9 Living Bible).

Friends, we can choose to live by Paul words, "*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellent and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*" (Phil. 4:8).

I encourage each of you to develop a winning attitude, by focusing on the future, by having a servant's heart, and by practicing the praise principle.

### Sources:

The message is from sermons that I preached over the years that I have been in the pastorate. I have compiled them from the notes I made before they were preached. I do not know where I found some of the material contained here. I may have borrowed it, as a whole or in part, from others. I simply do not remember. If this is the case, I apologize right now, and that our combined efforts will glorify God.