

Sermon
Lanier Christian Church
David Simpson
Series: "The Treasure of Words: Things said to me at church that had lasting impact."
July 11, 2010

Keep Moving Forward

1 Corinthians 9:24

Many of you know how it is when you meet your fiancé's family for the first time. You hope you like them and they hope they like you. Well, I was a preacher in training at Atlanta Christian College when I met my wife, Faith's family, for the first time. All went better than I could have expected. After meeting aunts, uncles, cousins, neighbors and friends we attended church on Sunday at Harleyville Christian Church in South Carolina.

One of the active members there is a man by the name of "Cotton" Knight. I don't know what his real name is, but that's what he goes by. He was one of the first to greet me that Sunday and one of many that spoke with me as we were leaving. I'll never forget what he said then, and what he continued to say every time I saw him afterwards.

"David, good to have you here today. Keep moving forward!"

Normally you hear that phrase at a packed event somewhere where an usher urges a crowd of people to "keep moving forward." But, Cotton meant it in a different way. A challenging way. It served as motivation for me. Keep moving forward! Keep growing. Keep learning. Keep increasing in your faith. Don't ever look back. Keep moving forward.

When I'm tempted to look back, to stop, to sulk and wonder what might have been, Mr. Cotton's words come to mind: Keep moving forward.

The apostle Paul never said that phrase but he very easily could have. What he did say is recorded in 1 Corinthians 9:24: *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize."*

Let's look at the power of this phrase for our Christian lives:

1. Keep moving forward – God made us that way.

Did you ever play with a "Mr. Potato head?" Back in my childhood we used real potatoes. It was fun to put the eyes in the back of his head, put his lips on the top of his head or put his feet backwards.

It's fun to make believe and be silly, but God did not make us that way. He didn't give us eyes in the back of our head, or turn our feet backwards. We were made, in his wonderful plan of creation, to move forward. Our eyes are in front, our mouth is in front, our feet propel us forward. That's the way God made us...to keep moving forward. Look at a young child as they learn to walk. We don't teach them to walk backwards. We teach them to move forward. We don't get behind them and say "Now walk backwards to me!" No, we get in front and urge them to move forward.

It's the way God designed us. We need to be forward thinking, forward moving people. We know that. We are now being urged not to use our phones while driving for talking or texting. Why? Because we take our eyes off the road. We look down instead of forward. Just this past week we were throwing the soft baseball to and grandson, Rhett and letting him hit it with his miniature bat. We kept telling him to "keep his eyes on the ball" to look forward.

God has shown us through His creation that we were made to move forward, look forward, and think in a forward direction. Why is it then that we take our eyes off the prize? Why do we look down and lose our focus? Why do we look back with regret? Why do we allow the past to prevent us from enjoying the future?

2. Keep moving forward – yesterday died last night.

Many years ago I took a Dale Carnegie course. It included tips on public speaking, remembering names, and an emphasis on how to stop worrying and start living. In one of his books and one of the classes I learned a phrase I'll never forget: "Yesterday died last

night." Yesterday is over. We can't recapture it and keep it going, nor can the defeats and failures of yesterday keep their grip on us. Every yesterday has its ups and downs. We use phrases like "I wish today would never end," or, "I'm so glad this day is over." But, no matter what, yesterday died last night and today is a new day. As the psalmist said: *"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."* - Psalm 118:24

God wants us to keep moving forward into the new day that He has made for us. Jesus warned about the danger of looking back and longing for the past and a life apart from him. He said: *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."* (Luke 9:62) As a young boy I borrowed my grandfather's hand plow and made my own garden. One thing is for sure...you can't plow looking back. Your rows become crooked. You have to stay focused and you have to move forward if you want to plant a good garden. If you've never experienced farming, then look at it this way. Try driving your car with your eyes on the rear view mirror and not looking straight ahead! You won't get very far!

Yesterday is over – today is a brand new day. Yesterday's sin is behind you - experience the new day of forgiveness. Yesterday's failure is behind you – experience the new day of another chance. Yesterday's success is over – experience the new day of more opportunities. Yesterday's regrets are no more – experience the new day of hope.

3. Keep moving forward – there's a prize ahead.

In our text for today, Paul mentions a race with a lot of runners. I'm sure he had witnessed several races or marathons in the Greek society he was exposed to in his journeys. I find it intriguing that in this verse, Paul mentions that there are many runners. Many are competing in this race...but only ONE wins the prize.

I think a lot of us would say we are moving forward. Maybe we would even say we are moving forward spiritually each day of our lives. I hope all of us here today would consider ourselves in the

race – the race of following and serving our Lord Jesus Christ. But, let's be honest. For many of us, we are just IN the race. We are not trying to win a prize. Paul said: "All the runners run..." All the runners are running – all are moving forward. Every runner knows that to be successful you have to move forward, you cannot keep looking back.

But many runners just want to be in the race. Today we would say, many runners compete to win a T-shirt, not first place. Look at the Peachtree Road Race each year in Atlanta on July 4th. Just last week over 55,000 runners competed. But the reality is that many of those walked, or jogged or both, but they were not even trying to win. There was a 90 year old lady that competed and crossed the finish line. The eventually winner was from Ethiopia and he beat someone from Kenya by a step and a half. It was one of the closest finishes ever. He had to give it his all to win the race. He didn't slow down by looking back. He didn't allow distractions to slow him down. He didn't allow negative thoughts about not winning to enter his mind. He just kept moving forward, focused, running, giving it his all in such a way as to win the prize.

What about your life? Are you running as a Christian with that kind of focus and determination? You move forward – never looking back. You don't allow distractions to slow you down. You refuse to allow negative thoughts to take away your faith and winning attitude. You are totally committed to give it all you have until you cross the finish line. Does that describe you?

Don't just be a runner – Don't just call yourself a Christian. Determine to be a committed, dedicated, passionate follower of our Lord Jesus Christ, not allowing anything to slow you down as you focus on the finish line of being with Him in glory.

There's a great verse that should serve as a challenge to us all:
2 Peter 3:13 says: "But in keeping with his promise we are looking **forward** to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

To those who look forward, to those who move forward striving to win the prize, there is a great reward – heaven!

Keep moving forward! It's worth every effort and the good news is that Jesus provides the strength to carry on through His Holy Spirit.

Keep moving forward! There's a prize awaiting you!

Extra:

Song: You can't move forward when you keep looking back. How can you think about the future when you're haunted by the past. God don't want you to live like that. Keep your hand to the plow and don't look back. By John Schlitt of Petra