

Sermon
Lanier Christian Church
David Simpson
Summer Sermon Series: *"The Treasure of Words: Things said to me at church that had lasting impact."*
June 27, 2010

Keep on Keeping on

Philippians 3:14

Words have such power. They have power to heal and power to hurt. Our son John was reading a book to his nephews, Jacob & Rhett, recently. It had a red headed little boy in it and John, as he was reading the story, said: "That's me." I read the same book to Jacob and Rhett on Friday and when I turned the page and they saw the little red headed boy, they said: "That's uncle John!"

It only took one reading. It was only said one time. But the imprint was made. Imagine if that had been destructive words they had heard. Imagine if the words were harmful, rather than helpful. It only takes one time for someone to say something that has lasting impact. When used for teaching, encouragement, and blessing words are a treasure. The writer of Proverbs called such words a "honeycomb." *"Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones."* (Proverbs 16:24) When used for harmful and hurtful reasons words become a tool of the devil, a "fire" as James said in his New Testament letter. (James 3:1-12)

Throughout my life there have been those who have opened their treasure of encouraging words and poured them into my life. Then there are, of course, those who have used their words to discourage and harm instead. This summer I want to share with you some sermons based on words that have been said to me at church...words not preached in a sermon...or taught in a Sunday School class...but casually said to me once or twice, but had lasting impact on my life.

Today's words of impact came from one of the elders in my home church of Hardwick Christian Church. When I came home from college one Sunday Mr. Grady Williams shook my hand and said to me: "David, Keep on Keeping on." Over the next few months and years, each time I would see him he would say the same thing,

"Keep on Keeping on." Now, I never asked what that meant, but I always received it as encouragement. I think he wanted me to never quit. I think that as a young man entering into ministry that he wanted me to continue moving toward the goal of growing and serving and learning in my walk with the Lord. As least that's how I received it. To this day, I have shared "Keep on keeping on" with many people in an attempt to encourage them to never quit.

When I look in my Bible, I think one of the greatest characters that showed such persistence and perseverance was the apostle Paul. He said in Philippians 3:14 – *"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

1. Keep on Keeping on....the goal is ahead.

This past Wednesday was an amazing day in the world of sports. For openers, the USA soccer team defeated Algeria in the World Cup 1-0. What made that win so exceptional was the fact that the goal was scored in "extra time." The U.S. was determined not to let the game end in a tie. **They refused to quit.**

And then, there was the tennis match at Wimbledon — the longest match ever played. It lasted 11 hours and 5 minutes, and the fifth and final set was decided Thursday by a score of 70 to 68 games (we are talking tennis here). It never happened before and will most likely never happen again. Both Nicolas Mahut and John Isner (the winner and graduate of the Univ. of GA) **refused to quit.**

And yes, when he went to the 2nd round on Friday he lost in 74 minutes, but that's because he played with no skin on his toes, after his feet took a beating in the previous marathon match. He played through the pain...even though he lost...but he refused to quit.

Paul used the analogy of an athlete when he talked about pressing on toward the goal. It is a fitting example. A true athlete will never quit. They keep on keeping on. What is disappointing for any sports fan is when you see an athlete give a poor performance and fans are heard to say: "They didn't even try!"

The motivation for any true athlete is that they keep on keeping on toward the goal before them...to win the game. To achieve whatever goal is before them. For a runner...it's to cross the finish line. In Greek society a runner winning the marathon race of 26 miles received a crown of victory. For the Christian we are in a race toward the finish line and when we cross it, we receive a crown of life.

There are so many temptations and distractions to stop any of us from keeping on. Satan loves to get our eyes off the goal. He wants us to slow down spiritually. He wants us to stop and consider whether we should go on or not. He wants us to be discouraged and quit. But, the great thing about perseverance is that there is a reward when you complete the contest or cross the finish line. Christian...keep on keeping on... the goal is just ahead. Don't quit. Keep on praying. The goal is just ahead. Keep on serving. The goal is just ahead. Keep on learning. The goal is just ahead. Keep on loving. The goal is just ahead. Keep on hoping. The goal is just ahead. Keep on believing. The goal is just ahead!

Why should I keep on keeping on as a Christian?

2. Keep on Keeping on ...the prize is eternal.

My friend, if we keep on keeping on, the prize we will receive when we cross the finish line of life is nothing less than eternal. Our theme verse for this year is so fitting here: Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Do you have any trophies at home? My children have some from their sports days. They are showing signs of aging and the metal plates are rusting. They were not made to last. But the treasure of heaven is eternal. It will not rust. It will not be destroyed by moths. No thief will ever steal it away.

The salvation that Jesus offers and the rewards of heaven are eternal and can never be taken away. It is a prize worth striving for! Therefore we need to keep on keeping on! Don't let anything or anyone diminish your efforts to keep striving toward the goal of eternal life with Jesus.

Why do we settle for temporary pleasures instead of keeping on toward the rewards of Christ?

Why do we stop striving and give up so easily when we know the goal of eternal life is worth the price?

Why do we allow others to discourage us and defeat us in our race to the finish line when we know that to keep on keeping on will bring victory to all who enter the race?

The apostle Paul knew that one of the greatest tools of our enemy, Satan, is that of discouragement. Paul prayed that he would have the courage to keep on keeping on, despite Satan's attacks.

²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. (Phil. 1:20)

The devil is standing on the sidelines of our lives shouting to us: "Quit!" "It's not worth it!" "The reward promised can't be true." "It's too hard – stop while you can." "You'll never make it!"

Sometimes the obstacles Satan throws in our way seem impossible to overcome. That's why we need the strength of our Lord, that's found in His Holy Spirit, at work in our lives.

You see, Jesus is standing at the goal line cheering us on. But not only that, He is our spiritual energy boost, our strength to carry on. Not Gatorade... but Jesus power. We all need the strength that only Jesus can offer. Paul said: *"I can everything through Him who gives me strength."* (Phil. 4:13)

If Christ is your strength, then you can keep on keeping on no matter what.

Just this week it was announced that...

*Joni Eareckson Tada, 60, founder and chief executive officer of Joni and Friends International Disability Center in Agoura Hills, Calif., has been diagnosed with breast cancer. Joni is an international disability advocate as a quadriplegic herself, and is also known for being an artist and author. "I've often said that our afflictions come from the hand of our all-wise and sovereign God, who loves us and wants what is best for us," Tada said. **"So, although cancer is something new, I am content to receive from God whatever He deems fit for me. Yes, it's alarming, but rest assured that Ken [her husband] and I are utterly convinced that God is going to use this to stretch our faith, brighten our hope and strengthen our witness to others."** [WordPress.com]*

*(**David's note: I believe Satan gives the thorn...or affliction...not God. Paul called his "thorn in the flesh" a "messenger of Satan.")*

Is your faith that strong? Can you keep on keeping on with that kind of obstacle thrown in your way? You can with the strength of our Lord at work in your life.

Why not choose today to keep on keeping on. If you're ready to quit today, know that You don't have to do it alone. Jesus is offering His encouragement today through His Holy Spirit. His strength is an endless supply of help for each day. Keep on Keeping on...the goal is just ahead and its an eternal prize worth our every effort!

Sermon by David Simpson