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Psalm 106:1-5, 47-48  
Philippians 3:8-14

### **“Letting Go and Reaching Out”**

**“I keep striving.” That’s what Paul, follower in Jesus’ way, wrote.**

“My friends... I don’t claim I have already succeeded ---  
I have not succeeded in knowing Christ fully.  
I’ve not experienced the full power of his resurrection.  
Nor have I become perfect ...  
**BUT I KEEP STRIVING.**

**Paul never quit.**

Rather, he stuck to his task when the going got tough.  
When people ridiculed him and said he was a false  
apostle and that he didn’t preach the true message  
about Jesus Christ.

**Paul stuck to his task** – as opponents tried to discredit him and  
brought false charges against him and threw him into prison.

**Paul hung-in** – even though he was sick with an illness he  
couldn’t shake – and suffered terribly.

“I KEEP STRIVING,” he cried. (well, actually, he wrote)  
PUSHING – PRESSING – STRAINING – GRASPING TO POSSESS  
THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH CHRIST POSSESSES ME!

**When can a person say, “I’ve done enough?”**

I know enough  
I’ve been through enough.  
I’ve seen enough.

**When can a person** close the book and  
PROP-UP FEET  
AND SAY I’M TIRED!  
I’VE DONE MY FAIR SHARE.  
Let someone else do it.

**When can a person** drop-out ...

Bow to the pressure  
Overwhelmed by frustration.

Overcome by fear and a sense of inadequacy.

**When can a person ...**

In all fairness to self ...

And in all fairness to family and friends ...

And to brother and sister church members ...

**say...i've gone far enough!**

This is the end.

The children are reared /My future is set ...

I'm going to settle down now in security –

And live off my earnings.

I believe – well, I hope -- my pension is secure ...

I'll live off the insights I've acquired.

And the righteousness I've  
accumulated.

And I'm going to take it easy ...

And preserve my health

**When can a person ... AND PAUL INTERRUPTS –  
NEVER!**

Keep striving, he urges. PUSHING – PRESSING – STRAINING –  
GRASPING ---

TO POSSESS THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH CHRIST JESUS  
HAS POSSESSED YOU.

Notice, when Paul wrote this letter to Christ's followers who lived in  
the city of Philippi ... **HE WAS IN PRISON.**

It was towards the end of his life.

Paul was older –SO WHY WASN'T HE WISER?

If there was ever a person who could say he had arrived, it was Paul.

If there was ever a person who deserved time-off for meritorious  
service – it was Paul.

If there was ever a person who could say, I've honestly  
done all I can do ... it was Paul.

Certainly – Now Paul could relax.

--Back off a little

and live comfortably – He had done enough.

**YET PAUL KEEPS STRIVING!**

Convinced he hasn't arrive

Convinced he's not perfect

Convinced that the world – and the relationships that structure the world and hold it together ARE NOT PERFECT.

**“I KEEP STRIVING” Paul writes, GRASPING EVER MORE FIRMLY TO POSSESS THE PURPOSES FOR WHICH CHRIST POSSESSES ME.**

I WONDER – WHY DID PAUL KEEP STRIVING?

Why this tremendous zeal ...

This burning passion to possess the purposes –

...to tell others about Jesus –

And Jesus' love –

And to link the arms of his brothers and sisters with Jesus ... and with one another?

WHY?

**BECAUSE PAUL WAS CONVINCED THAT JESUS ALREADY POSSESSED HIM!**

JESUS HAD ALREADY MADE PAUL HIS OWN ---

...AND THERE IS TREMENDOUS POWER IN KNOWING AND CLAIMING for YOURSELF THAT DEEP TRUTH.

Paul thought back to earlier days when he had cursed Christ –

When he held the coats of people who stoned Christ's followers.

His mind traced back to the days when – with hate in his heart he pressed on to Damascus to kill some more Christians.

**THAT'S THE WAY TO STOP THE MOVEMENT!**

That's the way to hold-back the new and protect the old.

That's the way to protect the status quo and maintain your own security. ...

**GET YOU A CHRISTIAN!**

STRIKE-DOWN THIS NEW THING.  
AWAY WITH THEM from the earth!

But on this trip to Damascus it was Paul who was struck-down.

(Who are you, Lord?)

Struck-down by Jesus – the Christ!  
(I am Jesus – The one you have been  
persecuting)

CLOSER TO THE POINT – PAUL WAS GRASPED –  
GRASPED BY JESUS, THE CHRIST.

(Lord, what do you have for me to do?)

Have you ever been going along in life – pretty well satisfied?  
The answers all worked-out?  
The children advancing – now out on their own?  
You have some money in the bank?  
Your financial assets growing again.  
Plans unfolding nicely?

YOUR WORRIES ARE IN THE PAST ...

BUT THEN YOU FEEL YOURSELF GRASPED – SHAKEN –  
The whole structure of your security challenged?

“WHO IS IT, LORD?”

Or you're at your wits end –  
Your marriage is fraying – or a long friendship is slipping –  
Everything said is taken the wrong way.  
Everything is misunderstood ...

So YOU HAVE BEEN LIVING IN SILENCE –

But then you feel yourself grasped – held – and again HOPE.  
AND DREAMS BEGIN MOVING AGAIN ...

“WHO IS IT, LORD?”

Or you're not working – retired, perhaps – or you lost your job –

it really doesn't matter which –

--and so much of you is tied-up in that job

Your Hopes and Dreams –

And your feelings of self-esteem lie shattered.

Odd jobs around the house – and Television – just don't make-up for what you have lost ...

...But then you sense yourself grasped –

Perhaps its more like a persistent tugging – a nudge, perhaps...

And new friendships discover you ...

And new opportunities...

And new ways of investing your life.

“WHO IS IT, LORD?”

Could it be Jesus, the Christ ?

Reaching for you.

Tugging at you...

Holding you ...

Reordering your priorities

Pointing you to where life really is ...

Giving you reason to hope and to dream?

Could it be Jesus, the Christ who meets us on our own Damascus road – while we are going about our own business ...

AND HOLDS US

AND, IF NEED BE, SHAKES US –

UNTIL WE CRY ---

**“LORD, WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?”**

Jesus' grasp on Paul ...

Jesus' unshakable grip on the life of this self-willed, self righteous, ego-centric, smug, power-driven PAUL ...

---tore Paul apart...

And opened him up ...

radically changed him –

and redirected his life INTO A MISSION OF LOVE FOR ALL PEOPLE.

Jesus, the Christ, grasped Paul –

Paul was held by that love –

By that compassion –  
 By that forgiveness.

Held as firmly as the Hymn writer who sang in response – **“O LOVE THAT WILL NOT LET ME GO...I REST MY WEARY SOUL IN THEE!”**

It is no wonder then that Paul should keep striving – Keep pressing-on ... making that love – that compassion and forgiveness known and felt by a growing number of people.

THERE ARE TWO THINGS I WANT YOU TO KEEP IN MIND,  
 HOWEVER, ABOUT PAUL AS HE KEEPS STRIVING ---  
 GOING ALL OUT TO MAKE KNOWN THIS LOVE –  
 THIS COMPASSION –  
 THE FORGIVENESS OF Jesus Christ....

First – according to our Scripture lesson ---

**PAUL LEAVES THE PAST BEHIND!**

That’s difficult to do, isn’t it?

It’s much easier to drag the past with us –  
 To let it poison new relationships –  
 To let it embitter us so that new days and new  
 experiences and new relationships ....  
 .... Are never really new, but only re-runs of  
 the old, frustrating, angry past.

**THE PAST BEHIND?**

That’s difficult to do when old memories keep haunting us –  
 Memories of unfilled love  
 Memories of shattered dreams  
 Memories of people who hurt us.

**THE PAST BEHIND?**

That’s difficult – (Impossible?) to do when you’re guilty.  
 Guilty of hurting another person.  
 Guilty of breaking a promise.  
 Guilty of writing-off another ...  
 ...saying „, I don’t care about that  
 person. That person is no friend of  
 mine.

LEAVE THE PAST BEHIND ---SO NECESSARY FOR US IN THESE DAYS.

Crucial for men and women in any day.

Crucial for people who want to keep striving –

Who want to live more fully ...

THE PAST BEHIND ... SO NECESSARY – BUT YET SO DIFFICULT!

**...UNTIL WE BEGIN TO REACH-OUT TO WHAT LIES AHEAD.**

That is Paul's secret.

He is a man of the present – pressing into the future.

Certainly his past was a pile of failures –

There were a lot of hurt, broken – Yes, dead people scattered in Paul's past...

No love there...

No compassion there.

No forgiveness there ...

**ONLY TERRIBLE GUILT.**

BUT JESUS GRASPED HIM.

JESUS FORGAVE HIM –

FREED HIM FROM THAT TERRIBLE, TRAGIC PAST

...AND SET HIM TO WORK ON THE DAYS

AHEAD.

**REACH-OUT TO WHAT LIES AHEAD!**

REACH OUT – that describes a sprinter going hard for the finish line.

REACH OUT – that describes lovers rushing to embrace...

REACH OUT – That describes A

CONGREGATION who has hopes and dreams for life – and who move forward – who GO ALL OUT to fulfill those goals.

**THE PAST IS PAST ...**

**FINISHED AND GONE –**

WE ARE IN THE PRESENT NOW – WITH THE FUTURE COMING HARD AT US.

**DON'T FIGHT THE FUTURE!**

Christ is Lord of the Present – **AND THE FUTURE.**

**DON'T FIGHT JESUS, THE CHRIST!**

But rather, recognize the grasp he has on you –

and let Jesus lead you – all the way – into the days ahead.

days filled with hope ...

and with faith-filled good works.