

ADVANCE!

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(In honour of our Sunday School Division 2014 Save Our Children theme.)

May 18, 2014

Sermon in a sentence: Our personal Christian walk and our efforts to see our children born into God's kingdom must be conducted in a mode of unrelenting Advance.

Scriptures: Phil. 3:1-15a; Eccl. 9:11a; Matt. 24:13; Ex. 14:15-16; Prov. 24:16; Joel 2:2b-11

Phil. 3:1 NASB Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; 3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His

death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but **one thing I do: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,** ¹⁴ **I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.** ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude....

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Here is the definition of the word “Advance” from the dashboard dictionary on your Apple computer: “Move forward, typically in a purposeful way”.

Most of what I have learned about this word Advance, I learned from my father. I was with him as he made the decision to sell our first church building that seated 96 to purchase a building that seated 1200. He then led us to add another floor to the building, doubling its square footage, and thereafter sell it to purchase our present building seating over 1800, along with a 150-unit seniors apartment building.

How was this done? By moving forward, typically in a purposeful way!

We laugh about one of Dad’s early messages. It was called: “The Inevitability of Gradualism”. As funny as the title was, (a message he delivered with all the charisma of a math professor), the point was simple and well made: keep putting one foot in front of the other until you get where you’re going. Advance!

In December 2013, an American journalist named Paul

Salopek went to Ethiopia to start a 34,000km walk from Africa, through Europe, Asia and North America, finally ending in Chile seven years from now at the southern tip of South America. (National Geographic, December 2013 cover story.)

How will this journey be accomplished? Yes, you've heard it before: "One step at a time". He has to Advance!

The thing about **Advancing** – 'moving forward in a purposeful way', is that it **demands focus**. You cannot advance in one direction while going in 16 other directions at the same time. Consider the folly of running around a soccer pitch, kicking the ball hither and yon, wearing yourself out, going nowhere – if there's no goal to shoot at. There are things you have to leave aside in order to focus on your goal. It's like putting blinders on a horse to keep his attention focused on the race he's running.

No, we cannot be all things to all people. No, we cannot go everywhere people want us to go and do everything people want us to do. Those who Advance learn how to lay aside every weight that would beset them and run light.

Advancing demands commitment and dedication.

"The race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, but he that endureth to the end shall be saved".

This is such a critically important concept that we have amalgamated and paraphrased two verses of scripture: (Ecc. 9:11a & Mt. 24:13), to come up with this single statement about the power of commitment to the race. Advance!

W.H. Murray was the deputy leader of the Scottish Himalayan Expedition of 1951. He wrote the following

paragraphs “On Commitment”:

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness concerning all acts of initiative and creation. There is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans; that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.

All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen events, meetings and material assistance which no one could have dreamed would have come their way.

To Advance demands action.

Fear is a great immobilizer. We can easily stand in place for minutes, hours, days, months or years without taking the next crucial step, which is: taking the next crucial step! Moses and the children of Israel came to the Red Sea and found themselves in a situation they deemed utterly hopeless. They had no escape route to the left or the right and the Egyptians were right behind them. However, the Lord's instructions were clear and simple:

Ex. 14:15-16 NASB Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to **go forward**.¹⁶ “As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land.

Illustration: Meeting with Dad at Weston Rd. re lack of funds to continue work on 2nd floor addition: “The Lord has spoken to me: we’re going forward”!

Certainly, we may get to the point where we feel our only option is to go backward – a ‘strategic’ retreat. However, our retreats only demonstrate our inherent weakness. God never tells His people to retreat. In every situation, His instruction is always been the same. “Advance!”

To Advance demands an iron will, a made up mind. A will that says: “If I fall, I will get up again and keep advancing until I achieve my goal”! I may fall seven times, but don’t count me out – I am going to get up and keep advancing!

Prov. 24:16 NASB For a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again, but the wicked stumble in *time of* calamity.

Paul wrapped it all up in our main scripture reading (Phil. 3:13-14).

- this **one** thing *I do*
- **forgetting** those things which are behind
- **reaching** forth unto those things which are before
- I **press**
- **toward the mark**
- **for the prize**
- **of the high calling** of God
- **in Christ Jesus**

“ADVANCE!”

The following is a prophecy that was first given in the OT describing an army coming *against* the people of God. However, I’d like us to turn into a description of the people of God on the move against the forces of darkness that seek to destroy our church, our homes, our children, our values and our faith:

Joel 2:2b-11 NLT

- 2b** Suddenly, like dawn spreading across the mountains,
a great and mighty army appears.
Nothing like it has been seen before
or will ever be seen again.
- 3** Fire burns in front of them,
and flames follow after them.
Ahead of them the land lies
as beautiful as the Garden of Eden.
Behind them is nothing but desolation;
not one thing escapes.
- 4** They look like horses;
they charge forward like war horses.
- 5** Look at them as they leap along the mountaintops.
Listen to the noise they make—like the rumbling of
chariots,
Like the roar of fire sweeping across a field of stubble,
or like a mighty army moving into battle.
- 6** Fear grips all the people;
every face grows pale with terror.
- 7** The attackers march like warriors
and scale city walls like soldiers.
Straight forward they march,
never breaking rank.
- 8** They never jostle each other;
each moves in exactly the right position.
They break through defenses
without missing a step.
- 9** They swarm over the city
and run along its walls.
They enter all the houses,
climbing like thieves through the windows.
- 10** The earth quakes as they advance,
and the heavens tremble.
The sun and moon grow dark,
and the stars no longer shine.

**11 The LORD is at the head of the column.
 He leads them with a shout.
 This is his mighty army,
 and they follow his orders.**

**That's how I like to think of us! As God's mighty army,
listening to His voice, following His orders and advancing!**