

“GO FURTHER, GET HIGHER”
Text: Philippians 4:8-9

By Pastor YAU
March 20, 2016.

INTRODUCTION:

1) The space is the limit: When space travel wasn't as safe as it could be, John Glenn put his life on the line to orbit the earth on February 20, 1962, to become the first American to do that. Twenty-six years later, In November of 1998, at age 76, he became the oldest human being to travel the space in the space craft, the Discovery, to make record of space travel. When asked why and how could he be so confident and daring, his answer focused on: There is no limit to what you can become if we put yourself into what you want to do. To John, even the space is not the limit.

2) The world is the limit: About 20 centuries before John Glenn, Paul was called to a mission no one had ever tried before: To bring the gospel message to all corners of the earth for the salvation of mankind. Without any support, any human understanding or any example to follow, Paul answered the call and launched that missionary endeavor, and continued his journey until the end of his life. To Paul, there isn't anything that could stop him from pursuing his goal and finishing his call. His fervency in going further, doing more, getting higher, has become the model of all missionary enterprises. To him, he said: “I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.” (Phil 4:13)

3) The heart is the limit: Since early years of my life, I always believe in the virtue of personal pursuit: Getting ahead, doing more, going forward. I not just practiced what I believe in my

life, I follow that principle in coaching my sons in their academic pursuit. I realized that not all people have the same background or God given ability or opportunity to achieve the same level of success on their pursuit, but I believe that in whatever situation God puts us, we should do our utmost with the gift and opportunity God has given us to achieve the highest possible results. I also believe that the urge or desire to go further, get higher and achieve more is in every human heart. We all want to be better person in what we do. The question we have now is HOW?

IT ALL STARTS FROM THE THOUGHT: “Think of all these things.” (4:8)

1) This is what Paul wants us do: *Logizomai* in Greek would be better put as “logic” or “dwell on”, other than “think,” to carry the true meaning of Paul's idea of the mind. This word means more than just the act of “think”, but the continuation of the thought in one's mind: You keep on thinking, or dwelling on the thought. You don't have to go to college to study psychology to know that the thought we cherish, keep thinking or dwelling on, will become the driving force of what we do and become.

To become effective as Christians or productive in our life, we need the proper “energy” to push us forward, and that energy is in our thoughts or our mind. The Bible leaves no doubt that people's lives are the product of their thought. Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is.” The modern counterpart to that proverb is the computer acronym GIGO (garbage in, garbage out). Just as a

computer's output is dependent the information that is input, so people's actions are the results of their thinking. Jesus expressed this truth in Mark 7:20-22, “That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of man, proceeds the evil thoughts, fornication, thefts, murder, adulteries, deed of coveting and wickedness, and deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.”

2) Modern application to Paul's call: Paul's call for biblical thinking or mind-set is especially relevant in our cultural. The focus today is on emotional and pragmatism, the importance of biblical thinking, or dwell in biblical thoughts is downplayed in every level of Christian life. People focus lot more on how they feel instead of what does God want in their lives.

Scripture describes the unsaved mind as depraved, (Rom 1:28) focused on the flesh, (Rom 8:5) which leads to spiritual death (Rom 8:6), hostile to God (8:7) foolish (1 Cor 4:4) and hardened to spiritual truth. (2 Cor 3:14)

We all know and experience the natural process how our thoughts control our actions. We also know the importance of checking our thought frequently to see if all the thoughts we cherish are biblical and acceptable in God's sight. Paul encouraged us to keep thinking things that are of above, than those of the world. Our mindset sets the course of our spiritual direction.

CHOOSE AND FOLLOW GOOD MODELS: “Whatever you learned or received or heard from me or seen in me.” (4:9)

1) An almost perfect model for us: Besides the Lord Jesus himself who is all perfect because he is God, Paul could arguably be the best model for all of us to learn from in our pursuit of Christian growth or Christian living. Besides that, there are many good people of God around us who set good example for us to learn or model from. Look around the church and find those who are so dedicated in their Christian living, their commitment, their integrity, their sacrifices, their selfless giving, their single-mindedness and long-term commitment to God and His church. We thank God for sending these people to our church and we thank God for having them among us so we can learn from them, serve with them, growth toward their level of dedication, and see how we can achieve what God wants us to achieve. Paul encouraged Timothy to seek and pursue spiritual growth with those who have pure hearts. (2 Tim 2:22)

2) The scope of spiritual virtues to pursue: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praise worthy.” (4:8) Paul listed eight kinds of spiritual virtues and asked the Philippians Christians to learn, pursue, and grow in their spiritual endeavor. We may need to start from just one, and grow it well before we pick up another one, little at a time, with determination and persistence, we can grow to mature the whole list in time. Many Christian don't know what to pursue or start, here is a good example to begin with. Growing spiritual virtues isn't as easy as we think, but it isn't too hard if we have a model and a starting point. Each of the eight virtues can be a sub-topic in

our study to develop into a whole sermon. The point is we can begin with anyone on the list and learn on our own pace, a little in a day. If we persist, we will get there someday.

HERE IS THE SECRET TO SUCCEED:

1) Spiritual growth is not for the elite: When we read what Paul said about his continuous pursuit of spiritual growth in Phil 3:12-14, “Not that I have already achieved all this, or have already made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, press on toward the goal to win the prize to which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” The idea of persistent in growing, both forward and upward in Paul's mindset should be in the mindset of all of us. Christian life isn't about stop and go or slide backward. God expects all of us do our utmost to push forward in every aspect of spiritual virtue. Besides Paul, we have read, seen countless faithful comrades did just that in history and even among us today. Don't stop, or sit back in your spiritual life to master what God wants you to achieve, to attain what God has in store, the crown of righteousness on that day, He wants to reward you when you see Him at the throne of grace. Paul encouraged us, “All of us who are mature, should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, God will make it clear to you.” (3:15)

2) All good things have their price tags: I don't know about you, but this is what I usually do: When I see something of

value in store and I like, the first thing I want to find out is how much it costs. I know not everyone does what I do. I am an economizer: Price is very important to me. I know all things have their value and prices to go along with. You want to get something good, you need to pay the price. “You got what you paid for” is always true.

This is true in spiritual pursuit: No real spiritual growth without paying the real price. Paul knew it and he advised us this way: “Whatever.....put it into practice.” (9c) Practice, *prasso*, refers to repetitive or continuous action. The English word has the same connotation like military training of recruits, we call drill. We speak of lawyers and doctors, as having practice: they keep doing what they were taught to do in medical school, so to be better in what they do. That is exactly what we Christian need to do if we are aiming to be better disciples for the Lord. This was true to Paul, it is true to all of us.

TRUTH IN PRACTICAL LIFE:

1) No good things comes for nothing: Among all the slogans used for military recruit, I like the one used by the Air Force: AIM HIGH. How nice does it sound, and how attractive it leads the potential recruits. Aim High is such a challenge, a goal, a purpose and a dream. I love to use it to encourage all my fellow brothers and sister in Christ: We all can and need to aim high in our spiritual pursuit. This is not just what our Lord wants to see in us, it is also a path to elevate the value of our lives in the eyes of our Lord Jesus Christ. He never wants to see us lose heart, lost in the muddy pool of worldly pursuit

and lose the opportunity to stand before God that day. We pay the price, we will receive the reward God has promised to all the faithful. Think of it: What else do we want to have when we see the Lord that day?

2) No one will be left behind: Read this again: “If on some point, you think differently, God will make it clear to you.” (3:15b) Paul understood that not all of us are on the same page, at the same pace. There could be some who do not have the same level of understanding or energy of pursuit. But he assured us of God's power in energizing us to be strong in this endeavor: He will make it clear, remove all obstacles, and uphold us in our struggle to achieve what He wants to see all of us to get hold of the crown.