

“Reaching Life’s Goal”

Scripture: Proverbs 3:1-8; Proverbs 3:1-8

Rev. Lewis Galloway

July 26, 2026



Football fever hit our country and world this summer. By football, of course, I mean soccer! With the World Cup having been played in eleven cities across our country, many have been glued to the screen to watch one national team compete against another. We have watched incredible athleticism, skill, dexterity, and sometimes even luck at play. The years of practice, discipline, training, and preparation can deceive us into thinking it looks easy.

When I think like that, I am reminded of the 2008 Summer Olympics, when the Jamaican runner Usain Bolt broke world records in the men’s 100 meter and 200-meter races, winning two gold medals. He went on to win a third gold in the 400-meter relay. When he was interviewed about his astonishing performance, Bolt commented, “I came out here prepared,” he said. “I worked hard—that’s all I can say. ... I worked hard to get here. It

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First Presbyterian
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wasn't easy at all. It may look easy, but it was hard.” (*Yahoo* article by Howard Fendrich, AP Sports Writer)

What does it take to live a Christian life? It may look easy, but there is more to it than might appear at first glance.

First of all, the Christian life is a gift of God's grace. In these words from Philippians, Paul compares the Christian life to a runner poised to run a race. Paul says that the goal of the race is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The goal is to know Christ and to be found in Christ. The goal is to participate in his death and share in his resurrection. The goal is to be conformed to the image of Christ: that is, to become more and more like Christ in our daily living until that day we live with him in glory. As a runner with a face set on Christ, Paul lets go of everything that hinders his running or gets in the way

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of the goal. Paul even dares to say that the good things in his life that he used to value so highly are not worth comparing to what he has received from Christ. Paul says that we can reach the goal of being found in Christ because Christ has already made us his own. Christ calls us to follow him; then Christ equips us to run the race. The track, or the ground beneath our feet, is grace.

In our Reformed faith we say that not only are we forgiven by grace, but that we grow each day in our faith by God’s grace working in us.

Sanctification is a big word to describe the process of growing more like Christ. Even our spiritual growth is not our own doing, but the work of God’s Spirit in us. Knowing that every good thing is the work of God keeps us from becoming boastful, proud, arrogant, or judgmental. As it is written in the *Scots Confession*, we will not grow in our Christian life “unless the Lord Jesus

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quicken that which is dead, remove the darkness from our minds, and bow our stubborn hearts to the obedience of his blessed will.” Since everything that we are and everything that we do are gifts of God’s grace at work in us, then the Christian life becomes a life of gratitude to God. It has been said that the whole of the Christian life can be summed up in two words: Grace and Gratitude. Grateful for the grace God has given us, we run the race that Christ has set before us.

Sometimes people get the idea that being a Christian is simply a matter of professing our faith, being baptized, and joining a church. Some think that after we do those things there is nothing else to do. This is only the beginning of our walk with God. Think about it: if you want to grow a garden, you cannot simply buy a piece of property, pull up a lawn chair, and wait for the garden to grow. To make a garden, we prepare the soil, water the plants,

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and hoe the weeds. Like a farmer who cultivates the soil or a runner who prepares for the race, there are ways we can open our hearts and minds to the work of God’s Spirit in us. In other words, it requires spiritual discipline to live a Christ-like life.

Throughout the history of the church, Christians have found many ways to grow in their relationship with God, to develop the quality of their moral life, and to become more mature in their faith. In Ephesians, Paul says that we have been given gifts so that we may “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (4:13). Today, I would like to lift up three spiritual disciplines and challenge each one of us to grow in our practice of them.

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The first spiritual discipline is worship. Worship is our offering to God.

The very first question of our Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “What is the chief end of human existence?” The answer is: “To glorify God and enjoy God forever.” We are to live our lives to the glory of God. God gives us the gift of worship and the spiritual fellowship of the people of God so that we may center our lives in God.

In corporate worship we learn who we are in relationship to God and to one another. We learn what it means to be a creature and a part of God’s creation. Today we celebrate Lachlan’s baptism, which is a visible reminder that he is God’s beloved child. In his baptism we remember our own: we too are beloved children of God. In worship, we are reminded of the limitations and possibilities of human existence. In worship we discover our destiny in Christ. We learn to read our own story in light of the big story of God’s

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redeeming love. We learn the important lesson that we are not the center of the universe. When we do not worship God, our lives become diminished, our outlook narrows, and we become captive to our own desires. When we worship, we take to our hearts the wise truth from Proverbs, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge God and God will make straight your paths.”

The second spiritual discipline is personal study and prayer. We cannot grow in grace if we do not discipline ourselves to practice the regular study of scripture. There are countless aids available to each one of us to help us with the disciplined study of scripture. It is important not only to find regular times to read the Bible, but also to read the Bible in a meditative and reflective way. The ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* invites us to find a quiet time to focus on a small passage of scripture. We read the passage slowly,

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meditating on the words, recalling memories and experiences that arise from the reading, and listening for the voice of God to speak through the words and the silence.

We teach and learn the Bible with our youth and children. This summer our youth are going to the Youth conference in Montreat. Beginning August 3, more than 100 children and 40 leaders at our Vacation Bible School will explore the nature of God and the wonder of God’s creation.

In the frantic pace of our lives, it is essential to find time to pray.

Howard Rice has written in *Reformed Spirituality*:

“Prayer is an act of letting go. It is not one more activity among other activities. To pray is to do nothing.... Prayer requires time, and we are slaves to the clock and the calendar. We tend to measure our lives in

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terms of work accomplished. Only when we believe prayer is important will we make the necessary time available. In this sense, finding time for prayer is like making time for the Sabbath.” (p. 83)

Spending time with God each day is essential for our spiritual health.

There is also the spiritual discipline of giving and serving. It may be unpopular to talk about money, but it is necessary because how we use our financial resources is a good indication of what we value. A life of generosity is a sign of spiritual maturity. We give out of our gratitude to God. The Bible teaches us the importance of regular and proportional giving. Some people do not like to plan their giving because they feel it undermines their freedom. If we are left to follow our whims and give only when we feel like it, it is unlikely that our giving will be generous, regular, or proportional. Taking

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the time to plan our giving is a spiritual discipline. It leads us to look at our resources and commit a portion of what God has given us to the work of the church and to the needs of others.

I have found that making a pledge to the church and to other charitable organizations is a good discipline. A pledge challenges me to stretch and grow in my giving. Bunny and I have found that giving a tithe or ten percent of our resources is a good place to begin. Tithing reminds us that everything we have belongs to God. It also makes us better managers of all our financial resources. If you do not currently make a pledge to the church, I want to challenge you to begin pledging. I urge you to do this not only because it will help the officers of the church be better stewards of the church’s resources, but also because it will help you practice the discipline of giving and grow in your spiritual life.

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Of course, we give not only our resources, but we also give ourselves in service to others. A personal goal of mine for our congregation is for each member of the congregation to be involved in at least one helping relationship outside his or her normal circle of family and friends. You might not think of service as a spiritual discipline, but it is. Serving others pushes us to leave those places where we are at ease, and enter those places that are unfamiliar, new, and challenging. God meets us in the stranger. God meets us in the cracks and crevices of life. We learn what life is like for an elderly person with no family, a child who is lost in school, an immigrant who speaks another language, an abused mother with children in need of shelter, a teenager with mental illness, or a family with no food. God meets us in the rough places of life and teaches us how to be better and more

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compassionate people. The more we give of ourselves to others, the more we grow in grace.

Those who know God through a life of worship, a life of reading the Bible and prayer, and a life of giving and service have an inner strength and a spiritual compass. They are like runners poised to win a race. From a distance it may look easy, for after all, the Christian life is a gift of God’s grace. The runners are disciplined. They have let go of everything that stands in the way; they press on toward the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. As the Jamaican runner Usain Bolt said, “I came out here prepared.”