

The Upward Call

by

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“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:12-14 (ESV)

This past weekend my eldest daughter turned forty-two years old. I still remember her birth and the surreal feeling that came over me when I first held her. She won my heart then, and still owns it now. Thank God we have a close and wonderful relationship. However, I believe that both she and I would have a deep, troubled, longing for restoration if our relationship was hurt, much like the Prodigal Father and Son longed for a restoration of their relationship after they were separated. There would be something powerful within us to drive us toward reconciliation. I am told that a woman bonds with her child at conception and gestation, while a man bonds when he sees and holds his child. That was the case with my wife and myself with our children. It is a powerful thing to have a bonding as parent and child. It is a God thing that it begins and continues.

I believe it is in God’s creative design that a father and mother bond like this with their child. I also believe that we get this imprinting on our DNA from God Himself because of the way He bonds with His child, for we were created in His image. This fact helps me understand why humans have a powerful “upward call” on our life, and it is in our DNA. We sense a powerful “need” for God, and to be restored from our estranged relationship with our Creator. Even though we do understand this to be the case, I believe the fact that there have been so many religions for so many years in mankind’s history, it makes a great case that mankind needs and wants to be re-connected with our Creator since sin originally separated us from Him because of Adam and Eve’s disobedience. Unfortunately, even though the need has been establish in us since birth, the distractions and counterfeits Satan gives to steer us away from “The Way” have been a powerful force as well. This brings me to the focus of the Apostle Paul’s words in Philippians, which is *the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*. *In Christ Jesus* we find the only path that leads us to that which we deep down long for, which is restoration with our Creator.

Note in the passage above Paul speaks of a *prize* and it was his *goal* to obtain it. He said he had not yet obtained it. This can be confusing and even discouraging and especially frustrating, if we feel that this *prize* Paul was speaking of is something that we can capture and take ownership of like most men want to think is the case with something they seek. For instance, we have a real struggle with thinking we are required to be perfect by God, but we are so downright imperfect that it is impossible to obtain perfection. But we miss the point. We do not arrive at a point of completeness or perfection in this life. It is impossible to attain to this. But, we give it our best by allowing Jesus to teach us how to live with this “upward call.” Golf is that way as

well. *Bagger Vance* made some good points about golf, and if you will look real hard you can see how they also connect with our hang-ups that keep us from being the man God wants us to become. Look closely:

Bagger Vance: What I'm talkin about is a game... A game that can't be won only played...

Rannulph Junuh: You don't understand...

Bagger Vance: I don't need to understand... Ain't a soul on this entire earth ain't got a burden to carry he don't understand, you ain't alone in that... But you been carryin' this one long enough... Time to go on... lay it down...

Rannulph Junuh: I don't know how...

Bagger Vance: You got a choice... You can stop... Or you can start...

Rannulph Junuh: Start?

Bagger Vance: Walkin...

Rannulph Junuh: Where?

Bagger Vance: Right back to where you always been... and then stand there... Still... real still... And remember...

Rannulph Junuh: It's too long ago...

Bagger Vance: Oh no sir it was just a moment ago... Time for you to come on out the shadows Junuh... Time for you to choose...

Rannulph Junuh: I can't...

Bagger Vance: Yes you can... but you ain't alone... I'm right here with ya... I've been here all along... Now play the game... Your game... The one that only you was meant to play... That one that was given to you when you come into this world... You ready?... Stike that ball Junuh don't hold nothin back give it everything... Now's the time... Let yourself remember... Remember YOUR swing... That's right Junuh, settle yourself... Let's go... Now is the time, Junuh...

Now is the time for some of you men. Now is the time for you to *play your game ... the one only you were meant to play.* Now is the time for you to step out of the shadows and choose who you will be, and WHO you will play for. Will you respond to the “upward call” that has been born within you, and start to become the man God has destined you to be? If so, you must understand that it is a process you will be in. Like Bagger said about golf, “*A game that can't be won only played,*” so it is with *the prize of the upward call.* We learn to *crawl, then walk, then run* toward this prize even though we will not obtain it until we are glorified with Christ. How do we do it?

First we *crawl*, by making a simple commitment to Christ to accept His provision and begin our journey into Christ-like manhood. God doesn't expect us to know much at this point. He will teach us what we will need to learn. But, what He is looking for is a sincere commitment at this point. Will you commit?

Next we *walk*, by amp-ing up our commitment to *self-feed* on God's word every day. God's written word is His clearest instructions to us for understanding His heart. His word is breathed out by Him, and it corrects, teaches, and instructs us toward the path of righteousness. Note, *righteousness* is not perfection, but rather a place of being in *right-standing* with God. We cannot attain to perfection, but we can secure a righteousness which is not our own, because we have responded to the *upper call* through Christ Jesus. Will you commit to become a *self-feeder* on God's written word?

Finally we *run*, by the surrender of our life. Junah had a lot of memories and hurts that he was carrying, and he felt that he could never be again the man he once was because of it. Bagger told him: “*you been carryin' this one long enough... Time to go on... lay it down...*” Junah had to surrender his past. Likewise in order to *run* your race and become the man that you long to be but cannot become by your own efforts, you must surrender your past, present and future, and press on for the *prize*. Paul understood what this meant to Him.

It was to lay down all those things that he once valued, that he had his identity in, and to establish a new way to value himself. Paul said it like this:

*“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—” **Philippians 3: 7-9 (ESV)***

Repeat: “... a righteousness ... which comes through faith in Christ...”

What lies ahead for the man who will abandon his life to Christ and then trust Him absolutely, will be a man who begins to learn how to live life as it was meant to be lived. It is the *upward call*, and the *call to Christ* that takes us to that place we long for in the deepest part of our inner being. Now is the time to respond to this *upward call*. Step out of the shadows, and play the game you were made for. Now is the time.