

Let Me Sum Up Part 2

Pastor Phil-osophy

Trying to figure out how to sum up and share some final instructions. Borrowing from a tv character, I decided to call this my Pastor Phil-osophy. (IYKYK) Here are some things that will help you if you'll pay attention and put them into practice.

Be consistent. I think one of the keys to being a disciple, a follower of Christ is consistency. Webster defines it as **“fixed, firm, solid, holding together, conducting oneself in harmony with one’s belief or profession.”** I might add the word steadfast. Make up your mind you are going to follow Jesus and then do it, not for a while, for a few weeks or months, not just while you are in school and coming to CAGY, not just as an attempt at turning over a new leaf, make that commitment, surrender your heart and life to Jesus and then live for Him for a lifetime. Be consistent in serving Jesus. That’s how you overcome sin and temptation, how you walk in holiness and victory. Be consistent in how you live, how you walk and talk, how you respond to people and circumstances, “conducting oneself in harmony with one’s belief or profession.” Be consistent in your prayer life, in church attendance, in worship, in faithfulness. If you fall, get back up and keep going. Don’t stop. Be committed, consistent, be unmoveable.

The Apostle Paul said, **“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” 1 Corinthians 15:58**

Consistency isn’t flashy. It’s like working out in the gym every day. It seems boring, doing the same thing day after day, but it’s how you grow, how you build up muscle and endurance. Consistency in your spiritual life is how you build up spiritual muscle and endurance, and faith. In 1 Corinthians 9:25 Paul says athletes train consistently to win a medal but we train to win eternal life with Jesus. Be consistent. Keep going even when the results seem slow in coming. Eugene Peterson, in his book *A Long Obedience In the Same Direction*, writes, **“There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.” ...Eugene Peterson** We signed up for a long apprenticeship, a lifetime of living for Jesus. Be faithful every day. Consistency matters.

Jesus said, **“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:62** He is talking about commitment, consistency. Once you’ve

decided to follow Jesus, don't look back, just keep going. Do what you need to do to make sure you keep following Jesus and living a life of consistent obedience. There is too much at stake.

The title of Peterson's book I quoted from is taken from the words of Friedrich Nietzsche. **"The essential thing 'in heaven and earth' is ...that there should be long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living."...Friedrich Nietzsche** If I could encourage you, if I could make a final plea, it would be that you live a consistent life for Jesus, that you pursue that long obedience in the same direction, following Jesus with all of your heart.

The second point of my Pastor Phil-osophy is **Be Vigilant**. Be on guard. The Scripture warns us to **"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith..." 1 Peter 5:8-9** The devil is looking for vulnerable people, ones who have lowered their resistance, who have compromised by wrong choices and sinful practice, who have embraced a cheap grace and a weakened spiritual discipline. You won't be able to run the race to completion if you don't remain vigilant. Stay alert! Don't drop your guard. **Don't get devoured by the enemy.**

Peter said, "Resist him, standing firm in the faith." The devil is prowling and roaring and looking, but it's not inevitable that you get devoured. Resist the devil. Rebuke him. Don't listen to his lies. Perhaps everyone else in your family, in your world has been devoured by the enemy but it doesn't have to happen to you. Stand firm in your faith. Consistency, remember!

Be vigilant. **Don't be enticed by the world.** We are to resist the devil but we are to flee temptation. Run! Don't put yourself in compromising situations. James says each one of us is tempted by our own evil desires, by our own lust and then, **"After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."** **James 1:15** Death!

I told our daughters repeatedly in their teenage years to guard their heart and guard the call of God on their lives. I knew and I told them if they could be bought, the devil would pay their price. I knew they could drop their guard and lose their way. I knew God had a better plan and purpose for their lives than anything the world could offer or anything they could imagine on their own. Whatever the world offers, it doesn't compare to salvation and eternal life in Christ, living for him. Don't let yourself be enticed away from Jesus. Don't be seduced by what John calls "the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does." (1 John 2:16). Be vigilant and don't let the devil devour you or the world deceive you.

Be vigilant. **Don't get distracted by fads.** Jesus warned his disciples, **“Watch out that no one deceives you...At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it.” Matthew 24:4, 23.** We are so easily drawn away from the reality of Christ to religious fads and signs, the latest “red moon” or the latest prophecy on youtube. Jesus said, **“A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Matthew 16:4** You don't need to run after signs, we already have the greatest one. This is the sign we focus on, the cross and the empty tomb. That's what Jesus meant by the sign of Jonah. Jonah was three days in the belly of a fish; Jesus was three days in the grave and then resurrection. Don't get caught up in religious sideshows, the latest “secret revelation” from Scripture. How many times have I said it in all these years? **“The main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things.”** Don't get so distracted by the culture wars that you lose sight of what is most important. Some preachers spend most of their sermon talking about what's wrong in our culture. It's no surprise sinners are acting like sinners. A broken culture is producing broken people, but Jesus died on a cross, was buried and three days later rose from the grave and is alive and able to save, forgive sins, mend brokenness and make us whole. That's the message I've preached, that's the sign we focus on. Jesus is the answer for the world today! Keep Jesus as the main thing. Be vigilant...

Don't get tripped up by disappointment. Life is going to happen to you along the way. Things aren't always going to turn out as you hoped or planned. Bad things happen to really good people while the wicked seem to prosper and skate by unscathed. I can guarantee life won't always be fair. Disappointments will come, even in the church. Christians friends will hurt you, disappoint you. Pastors will fail you, let you down. Turns out we are all human. Don't let it shake your faith. Remember what I've told you: **Life's not fair but God is always faithful.**

In Matthew 11:6, John the Baptist found himself in prison. The forerunner of the Messiah, things haven't exactly turned out the way he expected. Prison isn't where the cousin of Jesus is supposed to be. Maybe Jesus isn't who John thought he was. Perhaps he made a mistake, a miscalculation. Discouraged, disappointed, he sends some of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one or should we expect someone else?” Jesus told them to return to John and tell him what you've heard and seen: “The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor.” Then Jesus

says, **“Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.” Matthew 11:6** It’s that line that always strikes me. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me, who does not fall away because things haven’t turned out as you expected or God didn’t answer prayer as you hoped. Don’t get tripped up by disappointment, it comes with life. Don’t get tripped up when Christians don’t act like they should, when people say and do unjust or unkind things. Just keep looking to Jesus and trusting Him. Which brings me to the final point.

Be focused. How many times in recent months in the Revelation series did Sarah and I tell you to keep looking for the Lamb, keep looking to Jesus. If you take your eyes off of him, you’ll get lost, you’ll lose heart, you’ll forget what’s important, you’ll lose yourself. The writer of Hebrews told us to throw off everything that hinders us, take the blinders off so we can be laser focused and then **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2** Looking unto Jesus, KJV says. I’m telling you, don’t look away from him.

After feeding the five thousand, Matthew 14 tells us Jesus sent the disciples on ahead across the sea of Galilee. When a storm came up on the Sea, Jesus came walking on the water. When the disciples saw him, they thought he was a ghost. He identified himself and then Peter said “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.” Jesus said “come” and Peter climbed out of the boat, walking on water, but when he looked away from Jesus and focused on the waves and the wind, he began to sink. Peter cried out “Lord save me” and Jesus rescued Peter and brought him safely into the boat. Whatever is ahead in your life, keep your eyes on Jesus, especially in a storm. Fix your eyes on him!

Don’t lose sight of what really matters. Paul writes, **“Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Colossians 3:1-2** There will be a million things to distract you, disappoint you, tempt you, seduce you, pull you away from Jesus. Set your heart on things above and keep looking to Jesus. Don’t forget what’s at stake. We are talking about eternal life. Following Jesus and living for him is more important than anything this world has to offer.

One of the sermons I preached years ago, Keep Your Eye On The Prize, was about David and Goliath. You know the story, found in 1 Samuel 17. David is sent to the front lines where his

brothers and the army of Israel are facing the army of their enemies, the Philistines. While he is there the Philistine giant, Goliath walks down into the valley and challenges the army of Israel to send down a man to represent them. He will fight anyone they send, winner take all. If the Israelites win, the Philistines surrender and serve them, if the Philistines win, the Israelites surrender and serve them. David hears the challenge. No one responds but he hears the men talking. **“Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father’s family from taxes in Israel.” 1 Samuel 17:25** And David says “wait”, **“What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine?” “They repeated to him what they had been saying...” 1 Samuel 17:26-27**

David says “I’ll fight the giant.” Word reaches King Saul, who tries to outfit David in his suit of armor but Saul was a head taller than everyone in Israel. The armor wouldn’t fit and David tells him he would rather go without it. He’ll go with the spiritual armor and protection of the Lord. He’ll go with what he knows, a sling shot and some smooth round stones. He faces Goliath, knocks him down with a stone to the forehead and then takes Goliath’s sword and cuts off his head. He wins the battle for Israel, but what I want you to see is the three times he hears about what will be done for the person that defeats Goliath.

He hears it the first time, then asks them to repeat it, then a third time (v30) he turned to another group to ask and clarify exactly what the prize would be for the person who is willing to risk his life to face the Philistine giant. “Now what was it again? Did you say wealth?” “No great wealth.” “Great wealth? I wonder how much that is?” “And what else?” “You get to marry a princess, the king’s daughter. And your family will never have to pay taxes again, ever!”

“Okay let me get this straight. Wealth, you marry the princess and no taxes, ever.” “That’s it.” “I wonder which daughter it is?” “Does it matter? They’re all princesses.” “What does she look like?” “She looks like a princess.” (It’s like you said, she’s nice. She’s real nice.)

David faced the giant, in part to defend the cause of the Israelites. He tells him he comes in the name of the Lord and will cut off his head because he has defied the armies of Israel and today, when I defeat you, the whole world will know there is a God in Israel. But no doubt part of what was in David’s mind was what would be given to the man who defeats Goliath. David kept his eye on the prize. Walking down into the valley to face Goliath, he was thinking “God, I

know you're with me and I know you're going to help me." And he was also thinking, "great wealth, no taxes, I wonder what she looks like?"

He faced the giant with his eye on the prize. There are going to be giants in your way, giants that will be out to defeat you, giants that will cause your heart to tremble and fear, but keep your eye on the prize. It's worth the risk, worth the sacrifice. The prize for us is not wealth, or marrying a princess, or not having to pay taxes. (Turns out that princess wasn't as much of a prize as David hoped). The prize for us is Jesus. The prize for us is heaven and eternity with him. The prize for us is abundant life here and eternal life someday. Don't lose sight of the prize. Don't lose sight of what matters. Paul said, **"Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."** **Philippians 3:13-14** Stay focused on the prize and press on. Lean in. Run for the prize. John told us repeatedly in Revelation that it's the one who endures to the end that will be saved, the one who overcomes is given the crown of life. Don't lose sight of what matters. Don't lose sight of the prize. Keep the finish line in view. Keep Jesus in view. Stay focused and run for the prize. It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus.

I've tried all these years to keep Jesus the main thing and to help you keep Jesus always before you. I've tried to live consistently before you. I know I've failed along the way. I'm sure I've offended some, disappointed some, never measured up to some, wounded some and I'm sorry. But don't let me or my failures or my mistakes keep you from Jesus, from his church, from living for him. Don't stand before God someday hoping to argue "The reason I stopped living for Jesus is because Phil Taylor is a dirty rotten scoundrel." The Lord will say, "I know that, but what does that have to do with you and your decision?" Don't let anyone trip you up or cause you to stop living for Jesus! Once again, It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus!