

# “Prayer for the Journey: Accelerate!”

Philippians 3:7-14 <sup>1</sup>

I’ve always enjoyed flying. I think what I like best is feeling the surging power of the huge engines as they propel us from one world to another—either accelerating into the sky or decelerating back to solid ground—and wondering whether or not, in this particular instance, the engines will be able to accomplish this successfully. And several years ago I learned something about accelerating aircraft that I hadn’t known before.

There’s a point in the acceleration down the runway at which the Captain says to the First Officer, “V1,” for “Velocity 1.” This velocity, based on variables such as barometric pressure, air temperature, wind speed and direction, and the weight of the aircraft, is the point at which there is no longer enough runway in front of the aircraft to stop it, and the plane is now committed to lift off. There is no aborting the takeoff now. After V1, there is no pulling back on the throttle. V1 is the point of no return.

V1 is not the only such marker in takeoff, however. At V1, the aircraft can no longer be stopped, but it is not yet going fast enough to generate sufficient lift to take off. That takeoff speed is “V2,” after which the plane begins to leave the ground (and there are several other “V speeds”).<sup>2</sup> On August 27, 2006, Comair flight 5191 crashed and burned in Lexington, Kentucky (an airport out of which I’ve flown a number of times) because the mistaken runway from which it was trying to take off had sufficient length for it to reach V1, but insufficient length to reach V2.

Our theme this morning has to do with the spiritual acceleration of our lives from being grounded apart from God’s purposes, through V1 and V2, until we’re airborne on the wings of God’s Spirit and making good progress toward the purposes of God for our lives. One essential component for making such a journey successfully is to have an accurate guidance system so that we keep things pointed in the right direction.

Sometimes our ideas about God’s purposes fail to capture the real essence of what God is up to. I got an email some years ago that suggested that the way to understand God’s GUIDANCE is to think of it as “God,” “u,” and “I,” “dancing.” I like that. I think it’s a helpful, joyful corrective to the somber and stern images we sometimes have about God’s purposes in our lives.

When we think about God’s purposes, there’s no better place to begin than with Jesus’ last words to His disciples in Acts 1:8 before He ascended to heaven: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

Being “witnesses” simply means that we give testimony to others about what we ourselves have seen and heard. Our fulfillment of Acts 1:8 embraces the Village of Oakland Mills, the Town of Columbia, our nation, the United States, and indeed, all people everywhere. But it’s crucial that we remember that we’re not really trying to get people to “come to church.” We’re trying to introduce them to a vital, intimate, personal and transforming relationship with the Living God! We’re trying to teach people how to “dance” with God, and our goal in the dance is to follow God’s lead, to step in the direction and with the motion God is using in our time. Our goal is to discover where God is already at work and to join God in that work.

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, Maryland on March 31, 2013, Resurrection Sunday.

<sup>2</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V\\_speeds](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V_speeds); <http://aviationglossary.com/aircraft-terms-definition/v-speeds/>

We're sometimes critical of the disciple Thomas during the Easter Season because of the doubts he expressed when he would not accept second-hand word of Jesus' resurrection. *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side,"* Thomas said, *"I will not believe"* (John 20:25).

Perhaps we should actually be commending Thomas for not being satisfied with "second-hand experience" with Jesus. He would only be satisfied when he himself had personal, transforming experience with the Risen Christ. That's what our own personal goal should be, too, and because JESUS IS ALIVE, we can have such experience—not just once, but every day! It is that experience to which we give witness, and it is that experience to which we invite others: "Come with me to meet Jesus. He'll change your life!"

All of this brings me back to our text for the morning in the third chapter of Philippians. Let's look at it again:

*<sup>7</sup> But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

*<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup> Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But **one thing I do:** Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup> **I press on** [accelerate] **toward the goal** to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:7-14).*

These have been my "life verses" since my college days, and today I still want to make the days that remain to me count for God's Eternal Kingdom. I want to be a disciple who is sold out for Jesus. I want to use the resources at my disposal for eternal things. I want to live in that somewhat dangerous but extremely exciting territory where God's work of redemption is most clearly revealed. **I want my life to count for Christ**, and I expect that you do, too.

Whether we're 10 or 20 or 30 or 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 or 80 and beyond, God has put a hunger in each of our hearts for something BIG enough and GRAND enough to give all of our lives to. And the great New York preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, wisely pointed out that no matter what we say our life goals are, our lives tend to produce what we desire with all our hearts.

Whether our passion is money or property or power or influence or even a good golf game, our lives tend to quite dependably produce what our hearts yearn for more than anything else. So . . . as you compare the *fruit* of your life at this point to that passion with which you first followed Jesus, do those trajectories match?

Does the spiritual "building" that represents your obedience to Jesus stand completed at least to the point where you find yourself in life, or does it stand half finished next to something you've built for yourself? Has your obedience to Jesus been diluted or abandoned because of its cost in social status, time, or wealth? Have you said to Jesus, "I'll follow you this far, but no farther?" Have you passed V1, but stopped short of V2?

Bear in mind what happens to aircraft that pass V1 but fail to reach V2. That's the kind of thing Paul was talking about when he wrote, *<sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup> their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will*

*bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. <sup>14</sup> If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).*

That's a rather different outcome than "God, u, and I, dancing," and it suggests that wisdom is needed during our acceleration. Few things in life are more distressing than getting to the top of the ladder only to realize we've leaned it against the wrong wall; and the discerning of which "wall" to choose is indeed a matter for divine guidance. Christians who hold back on the throttle for whatever reason, never experience all that Jesus intended to give them once they were airborne.

C.S. Lewis offered help with divine guidance when he wrote that "When you come to knowing God, the initiative lies on His side. If He does not show Himself, nothing you can do will enable you to find Him. And, in fact, He shows much more of Himself to some people than to others—not because He has favorites, but because it is impossible for Him to show Himself to someone whose whole mind and character are in the wrong condition. Just as sunlight, though it has no favorites, cannot be reflected in a dusty mirror as clearly as in a clean one.

"You can put this another way by saying that while in other sciences the instruments you use are things external to yourself (things like microscopes and telescopes), the instrument through which you see God is your whole self. And if your Self is not kept clean and bright, your glimpse of God will be blurred—like the Moon through a dirty telescope."<sup>3</sup>

It seems to me that we frequently ask the wrong questions in our quests to discover "the will of God." While it isn't wrong to search for God's will in more or less ultimate ways for our lives, it's far more often the case that God's purposes in the larger trajectories of our lives become more clear one day at a time as we follow what we already know to be God's purposes in the ordinariness of our daily lives.

For example, while we may want to know God's will about where to go to college, what to major in, whom to marry, or whether or not to take a job opportunity, we already know that God intends for us to nurture our personal relationship with Him in daily study and prayer.

We already know that God intends for us to live with complete integrity in all of our daily activities. We already know that God intends for us to be obedient stewards of our resources, which include such things as our time, our relationships, our wealth, and our health. We already know that God intends for us to be meaningfully engaged in ministry in the church and in mission in the world. We already know that God intends for us to be faithful to all of our relational commitments.

If we stopped to think about it, most of us could fill a chalkboard with the things we already know about God's will for our lives. Furthermore, if we choose to disregard what we know to be God's will in any of these "more ordinary" matters, we have thereby unplugged ourselves from the conduit through which God reveals things we don't yet know.

**God doesn't grant additional understanding to persons who have chosen not to follow the truth they already know.** When our sense of God's direction in our lives seems fuzzy, the first question to ask ourselves is "Are there any areas of my life in which I'm failing to follow the guidance God has already given me?"

I invite you to consider this bottle of "juice." The label says "100% Sparkling Fruit Juice," and it's labeled as "cranberry," but examination of the ingredients reveals that cranberry juice is

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pp. 164-165.

fourth and last on the list, after “carbonated water,” “apple juice concentrate,” and “white grape juice concentrate,” and right before “natural flavors.” The enticing pictures and clever labeling are decoys to sell a diluted, cranberry *flavored* product, disguised to look like something it isn’t.

Erin Bunting, reflecting on such a discovery, wondered, “What if I had an ingredients label printed on me? Would Jesus be the main ingredient? If not, how far down the list would He be? . . . My packaging may be convincing. I may look and sound like the real thing. But what if someone came to me looking for Jesus beneath my ‘Christian’ label and found something else instead . . . something ‘Jesus-flavored’ but not ‘Jesus-filled?’”<sup>4</sup> **“Jesus-flavored” is V1. “Jesus-filled” is V2.**

So what’s your velocity this morning, my friend? Have you reached V1, that point of commitment to Jesus from which there is no turning back? Have you reached V2, that point of obedience and deeper commitment that makes you ready to follow Him, no matter what?

Peter put it this way: “As we know Jesus better, his divine power gives us everything we need for living a godly life. He has called us to receive his own glory and goodness! And by that same mighty power, he has given us all of his rich and wonderful promises. . . . So make every effort to apply the benefits of these promises to your life. Then your faith will produce a life of moral excellence. A life of moral excellence leads to knowing God better. Knowing God better leads to self-control. Self-control leads to patient endurance, and patient endurance leads to godliness. Godliness leads to love for other Christians, and finally you will grow to have genuine love for everyone. The more you grow like this, the more you will become productive and useful in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:3-8).

The Bible tells us that Jesus endured the *agony* of the cross for the sake of the *joy* that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). And what, in all the cosmos, might the Creator Himself gain by the cross that would not be available without it? **That treasure, my friend, was the possibility of spending eternity with you.**

The message of Good Friday and Resurrection Morning is that God loved you—and continues to love you—that much! **God wants to spend eternity with you, and God wants you to bring as many others with you as you can.**

My friend, **I challenge you to risk something Big for something Good.** Let’s accelerate together toward the inbreaking Kingdom of God!

<sup>4</sup> Erin Bunting, “Jesus Flavored, or Jesus Filled?” [www.Kyria.com](http://www.Kyria.com) (10.7.09).