

Fourth Quarter Strategies – Saturday, April 15, 2017

Many years ago I had the pleasure of meeting two Olympians at the Pasadena Games. The high school participants in those games were treated to an exclusive exhibition by two members of the US Olympic Track and Field Team that year. Dr. E. Wayne Collins, who ran this Jaycees event under my direction as a Pasadena Jaycees Board Member, arranged for his close friends Mac Wilkins and Dwight Stones to personally interact with all those young men and women as well.

A few months later, Wilkins won the Gold Medal in the discus throw at the 1976 Montreal Olympics and Stones won the Bronze medal in the high jump. Both were world record holders in their events. Just imagine a 6' 2" human being jumping 7' 7 1/2" vertically! In 1993, Cuban-born Javier Sotomayor set the current world record of 8' 1/4" (2.45 meters). That's a record that may well not be broken for a long, long time. Now in our individual lives, we too can strive to reach new heights.

Naturally, in business we often set lofty goals. Frankly, I've always relished that challenge. We don't need to set world records, but it's extremely satisfying to exceed our goals. The higher we go, the higher we want to go! It's hard to satisfy our desires in business and in life.

Dwight Stones set the world record in the high jump in 1973 in Munich and then followed it up with new world records two months apart in 1976 after the Montreal Olympics. Each time he bested his record by a half inch. Mac Wilkins set the world record in the discus in the Spring of 1976 and then set new records on three consecutive throws in a meet only a week later. Can you imagine setting a world record in your discipline and immediately setting new goals and meeting those goals on the next two attempts?

One of the "Up and Comers" in the first century was a young Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus. He was probably on track to become Chief Priest in due time. In Philippians 3:5-6, the Apostle Paul tells us that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews, a righteous zealot who persecuted the church. In verse 7 he continues, *"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ."* You see, Paul came to the right conclusion – all that truly mattered was his relationship with Christ. All else he considered "rubbish" and of no heavenly value. The only heights he wanted to reach were found on a new heavenly plain. The things of this world no longer mattered to Paul once he met Christ on that road to Damascus.

As a follower of Christ, my emphasis these days is simply to become more intimate with my Savior and Lord. In Hebrews 3, the author encourages all believers to persevere and not give up what we know to be true. He continues in Hebrews 12:1 *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."* This track and field analogy has always encouraged me in my walk with Christ.

There's certainly nothing wrong with setting goals and striving to better yourself, but we do need to make certain we don't harm others in the process. After all, I imagine many of them are striving to reach their goals as well. We simply need to remain balanced and not lose sight of God's purpose for our lives.

Paul continues in Philippians 3:12-14, *"Not that I have already obtained all this, or have been 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 yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: 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."*

Please continue striving to reach those business and personal goals in your lives, but do not lose sight of what's most significant. Keep your eyes focused on Christ and the bar He has set for each of us. With His help, we can all reach new heights for His glory!

Passages to Ponder: John 17:20-26; Philippians 3:5-6 & 7-9; Hebrews 3:1-6; 2 Timothy 2: 5-10; James 1:11-12

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John 17:20-26 New International Version (NIV)

²⁰“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

Philippians 3:5-6 New International Version (NIV)

⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

Philippians 3:7-9 New International Version (NIV)

⁷But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What 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 ⁹and 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.

Hebrews 3:1-6 New International Version (NIV)

³Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. ²He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house. ³Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. ⁴For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. ⁵“Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house,” bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. ⁶But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.

2 Timothy 2:5-10 New International Version (NIV)

⁵Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules. ⁶The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. ⁷Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.

⁸Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, ⁹for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. ¹⁰Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

James 1:11-12 New International Version (NIV)

¹¹For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

¹²Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.