



Links Players

Strength and Encouragement

Finally, believers, rejoice! Be made complete [be what you should be], be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace [enjoy the spiritual well-being experienced by believers who walk closely with God]; and the God of love and peace [the source of lovingkindness] will be with you. (2 Corinthians 13:11)

There is a joke that the Amplified Bible is for those who are hard of hearing. Sometimes, that is truer than the joke when it comes to Bible reading. How often do we read (or hear) a word from Scripture and yet don't really "hear" or act on what we hear?

There is a phrase repeated a few times in the Bible that reads, "Seeing they have not seen, and hearing they have not heard" (Isaiah 6:9).

Where am I going with this? Well, as a hopeful golfer always in search of a better game, I have read my share of instruction books and watched too many instructional videos. Now that summer has finally arrived in Michigan, I can't blame my game on the weather.

One book I re-read is the classic Harvey Penick's *Little Red Book: Lessons and Teachings from a Lifetime in Golf*. Penick's book is filled with jewels of golf wisdom, none more famous than "Take Dead Aim."

Penick meant that without an aim that is focused on the target, you will never strike an acceptable shot, unless you hit one out of pure luck. Penick instructed all his students, "Take Dead Aim."

That's good instruction for anything we hope to accomplish in life. What's the old saying? "If you aim at nothing, that's exactly what you'll hit." Let me "amplify" that. Without a goal in mind, a direction to point to, or an outcome to accomplish, not even luck will get you to your target.

That's what the Apostle was getting at in today's passage. The church at Corinth was about as unfocused, distracted, and dysfunctional as a church can be... then and now. But Paul doesn't give up on them. He doesn't bail on them; Paul ends his letter with an encouraging and inspiring "Little Red Book" type of appeal.

Paul tells this imperfect church, "Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you." I'll amplify that... TAKE "DEAD AIM" AS YOU FOCUS ON THE FUTURE.

Paul's outline toward perfection: Encourage one another. Do whatever you can to urge others to be devoted followers of Jesus. We live in a world where people are bringing other people down, thinking

that, in the process, they will bring themselves up. Take aim... and, instead of discouraging others, encourage them.

Paul says, "Be of one mind." The issue today is that too many are looking to find their unity in everything but Jesus – musical tastes, political views, economic interests, and civic affiliations. None of those things are inherently evil, but none of them can sustain missional helpfulness.

The only way we can become all that Jesus needs us to be is by focusing our energies and attention around advancing the cause of Christ. Following His lead is the best way to come together. Anything else, or anyone else, is not a "dead aim;" it's a "dead end."

I think when you analyze where the Corinthians went wrong, it was because they stopped growing in the grace and knowledge of God. Maybe they became complacent or satisfied. Maybe they came to a place where they thought they had arrived.

Maybe your greatest temptation is to put your spiritual life in neutral, to think you've arrived, and to grow smug. Through Links Players, we want to encourage you and grow with you, because that's what it means to be a perfect people, not so much in terms of our being sinless but being whole and complete. So, let's take dead aim.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to take dead aim on the target You have set for me. Sharpen my vision so that I do not waste my energy on things that do not matter, but rather on the callings You have designed for my life.

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Bill Crawford

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