

I don't know how many of you are cricket fans, but I'm hoping you will have heard of Sir Richard Hadlee, the New Zealand fast bowler and all-rounder from the 1970s-1980s, he was New Zealand's greatest cricketer.

Richard Hadlee was a professional sportsman; cricket was what he did for a job, day in and day out from the time he was very young. He played in New Zealand and England, and all around the globe at international level with a world class reputation. He was chosen by Wisden, the cricketing bible, as the second greatest test bowler of all time.

But during his career Richard Hadlee had a time when things weren't going so well. He was a tear away fast bowler coming off a long run and his body was starting to pack it in, not only this, but his love for the game that paid the bills and would make him a legend, was waning. He was thinking about giving it away.

Then over a period of time in the early 1980's, he made some adjustments to the way he played. He changed his action and shortened his run, and he rediscovered his love for cricket by finding new ways to motivate himself.

For Richard Hadlee this meant focusing on the statistics of cricket. The number of wickets he could take, the number of runs he would score, his batting and bowling averages, his test legacy. Many people criticised him for this but it was what he needed to keep him going ... and he became the first person in history to take 400 test wickets, and he played until he was 39 ... so for him, it worked.

Richard Hadlee needed to change the way he did things and find a bit more motivation to keep things moving as far as his cricketing career was concerned.

Paul is looking down the ages at Richard Hadlee as he pens these words from Romans, because he essentially says the same thing to them and to us, that sometimes, we need to change our action and find that little bit extra motivation to keep going.

It's as if Paul looks into our hearts and says, "you realise what's happening, it's not the time be giving up or letting go, it's the time to be stepping up and pressing on."

You see, Richard Hadlee made his changes late in his career, once he had been on the professional cricket journey for some time, Paul addresses the Romans in the same situation. They are no longer new converts; they have been travelling this way for many years and things need a readjustment.

We know that in the time we have been attending church; holding on to our faith, believing; that things have changed. Just like Richard Hadlee, we know that our Christian lives are shorter than they were when we started. We know that the night is far gone and the day is near.

Much nearer than it used to be.

So, Paul urges us to continue to change our action.

To stop doing what we know is unhelpful. The things Paul mentions are corrosive actions against human community. All things that erode community life and harmony. If we dig a little deeper, we can see that this destruction of community also applies on less obvious levels.

Thinking and speaking negatively about others and ourselves, blaming others for our life story and feeling sorry for ourselves, instead, he encourages us to do what enhances community.

Loving one another.

Community building can be just as simply powerful as community destruction; looking after those around us; doing good in our families, at work, where we live, speaking positively about people and situations, thinking positively about others, ourselves and our life stories, being grateful and thankful.

Paul urges us not to give up, but rather like Richard Hadlee to find new motivation.

That we be attentive to God; pray, read the scriptures, meet together for worship. Be enthusiastic. Make good choices. He urges us to fine tune our motivation so that we can keep going and be the whole community we are called to be.

Finally, he offers us his best, calling us to put on Christ.

For Paul this is total transformation in action and motivation, what more, he implies, can we want.

Christ is our life and breathe, the one to whom we owe everything.

If we are struggling, Paul says, put on Christ, change of action and new motivation will surely follow.

Richard Hadlee found himself in a very difficult place in his cricketing career. Ready to give up and give it all away, he did some soul searching. He changed his action and found new ways of motivation. It transformed his professional life.

Paul from nearly 2000 years ago looks down the ages and says exactly the same thing to us.

If we find ourselves in a difficult place today, if we are ready to give up and give it all away, let's do some soul searching. Let's change our action and find new ways of motivation, let's put on Christ ... and be transformed.

For just like Richard Hadlee in the early 1980's ...

The night is far gone and the day is near ... it is closer to us than when we first believed.

Thanks be to God.