

ESF, Lord's Day Service Message
12/27/2015

Pressing on Toward the Goal

Philippians 3:12-14

¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers, 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, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

It is time to make resolutions for the coming New Year. With this text, Paul provides a way to make meaningful resolutions. To do this we need to remember two things. They are: 1) Forget what is behind. 2) Press on toward new goals.

Forget what is behind

Many people are shackled by the things of the past. They are trying to run the race by looking backwards. Then they fall down. That is why Paul says here “... *Forgetting what is behind ...*” What does Paul mean by that phrase?

1. Success

By the time that Paul wrote this letter, he had completed three mission journeys, established dozens of new churches and converted thousands of souls. He might have been content with such past success and achievement. He could have been tempted to live an easy life based upon past success without making any further progress in his life.

However, Paul said “no way!” He said, “*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*” Paul did not allow his past success to make him proud or to become complacent.

There are some good Christians who have served the Lord fruitfully and they dwell in the past fruit without striving to improve. Usually when this happens they start to backslide. They allow sin to creep into their lives.

So, we must not become complacent with past success. In 1 Corinthians 10:12, Paul says: *if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!* We must realize that the enemy is present and wants to destroy us. We are in a never ending battle against the enemy. When we are in the middle of a battle we cannot rest, because if we do, the enemy will attack and destroy us. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says, *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, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*

2. Failures

Also what is in the past that we have to forget is our failures. Many people regret and feel guilt of their past failures, mistakes, and sins so that they become mentally, emotionally paralyzed. They are unable to move forward to improving their lives.

Paul is telling us that we can turn our past sins and failures over to God and start moving "forward to what lies ahead." In the past he had been a persecutor of the church of Christ. He felt that he was the worst sinner. But he was determined to forget his past failures, which he could not reverse. How could he do that? He just repented of his sins if any failure was caused by his own sins, and believed the forgiving grace of Christ. He believed and experienced that Christ graciously gives second chances in spite of past failures. In 1 Timothy 1: 13-15 Paul testifies: *Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy ... The grace of our Lord was poured out on me*

abundantly, ... Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst.

There have been failures in our past. We feel guilty of what we have done. We all have done things we are ashamed of. But we have to believe in God's forgiving grace.

Psalm 103:8-12 says, *The LORD is compassionate and gracious,he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

Don't let the sins of yesterday load you down and hinder you from moving your life forward! Trust in God's mercy. Forget the past failures as God has forgiven and forgot them.

3. Troubles

To live a life of moving forward, Paul also forgot his past troubles. While he followed Jesus, he faced many troubles. He was mistreated, mocked, rejected, beaten, and jailed. But he did not let the painful memories of these troubles crush him. He did not let the troubles depress him. He did not let the troubles prevent him from moving forward positively.

How did he forget the troubles? He believed that God turns all troubles into good for believers. In Romans 8:28 Paul says, *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* It is that through troubles he shared the suffering of the cross of Jesus. So he took the positive aspects of the troubles and forgot all the negative aspects of the troubles.

Joseph also knew this secret and was able to forget the troubles in his past life and positively moved forward continuously. In Genesis 41:51, Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "*It is because God has made me forget all my trouble....*" He said to his brothers, who had brought so much trouble in his life in Genesis 50:20, "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*"

Have we had troubles in our lives? Of course we have. We all have had troubles. We cannot change the events or the difficulties that have already happened to us. But we can choose to forget the negative influence of the troubles in our lives. With faith in God's goodness, we can forget the troubles. We can look forward to receiving the best blessings. So choose the way of faith now. Believe in God's goodness now. Forget all the negative aspects of the troubles you have had.

Press on toward the goal

To keep improving our lives, while forgetting the negative influence of the past, we must set goals for our lives and press on toward those goals.

1. Set a primary goal

In verses 13, Paul confessed, *But one thing I do:*... He had a primary goal.

Obviously Paul did more than one thing. He made tents. He preached sermons. He planted churches. He wrote many letters. Paul did a lot of things. But what he is telling us is that his top priority in life was to "do one thing." Paul learned one of the secrets of moving forward is concentration! He's saying, *I'm going to give my life to one thing of value and purpose!*

There is an old saying that emphasizes the importance of living life focusing on one thing at a time. It is, "If you try to catch two rabbits at

once, you will not be able to catch even one of them.” If we want to live a successful life, we must set one main priority and set our focus on that priority.

Paul’s main priority was “*to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*” It is seeking and following God’s will.

Who can live a greater life than Jesus did? Nobody. By following the example of Jesus life, we can also live great lives. Jesus set a primary goal in His life. It was to follow God’s will and accomplish it. Everything He did in His life was to prepare for and to achieve the primary goal.

To keep improve our lives and live great lives, we must seek and follow God’s will first. And all our other goals and plans must aim to accomplish this primary goal. We may have many important matters to take care of in our lives, such as our families, our friendships, our finances, our jobs, our careers and etc. But the most important thing that surpasses all these matters is “*to win the prize for which God has called us in Christ.*” Simply put, it is to seek God’s will and God’s glory. Because when we accomplish the primary goal, God will bless our lives in every way. That is the sure promise of Jesus in Matthew 6:33, “*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*”

While you are thinking and praying to set goals for the New Year, set this primary goal first- “I will seek and follow God’s will. I will do everything to glorify God.”

2. Set detailed goals

To achieve the primary goal we need to set detailed goals. Paul did not try to achieve his primary goal without detailed goals. He did not do his ministry randomly. He did his ministry with clear goals. In doing his mission work, he set goals with whom he would go, where he would go,

and what he would do. He set goals to reach out to people as many as he could. He set goals to write letters to the churches. He set goals to raise relief funds from the churches to help believers in Jerusalem. He set goals of whom he would select and post for certain churches. He set goals to do ministry in Rome which was known as the capital of the world in his time. We don't know how many years he lived. But we can be sure that he lived every day of his life with clear goals. The goals motivated him to use his time and his resources wisely and efficiently.

Until Jesus reached 30 years old, He lived an ordinary life as a carpenter's son. When He grew up He became a carpenter. In doing carpentry for a living, He must have set goals on how to produce the best products for the best price. He must have set goals to make the carpentry business both an honest and a profitable business. He must have had goals to provide his family with what they needed daily as the eldest son. He also had goals to grow spiritually every day. He had goals to read and mediate on the entire books of the Old Testament. He had goals to study the needs of people and how their needs could be met by God. He had goals to study and learn about the teachings and lives of religious leaders. He had goals to discipline His prayer life to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to follow God's will day by day. How do we know this? His life and teachings of public ministry reflected it.

What are your goals for the New Year of 2016? How can you set goals that are achievable?

Make specific and clear goals. If your goals are too general and unspecific, they do not help you improve anything. Do not make goals such as, "I will be a better person in the New Year" Instead make goals like these: "I will grow my character in self-control. To do so I will obey God's word regarding self-control. I will seek and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit day by day to produce the fruit of self-control" Do not make goals such as: "I will try to be better in managing my finance." Instead make goals like these, "I will regularly tithe. I will save at least 5

% of my income every month. I will not borrow money beyond my payment ability. I will give some money once a month to help our missionaries and the poor and needy in our church.”

Make realistic and achievable goals. If you set goals which are unrealistic or too high you will constantly get discouraged and will easily give up. If you read the Bible three times a week, set a goal to read five times a week. If you have not prayed regularly set a goal to pray regularly. If you average 5 minutes of prayer a day, make a goal to extend it to 10 minutes a day. If you come to church only once a week, make a goal to come to church one more day a week or even one more day a month.

3. Press on toward the goal

After we set goals we must press on toward the goals. The word “*press on*” carries the idea of intense endeavor. The Greeks used it to describe a hunter eagerly pursuing his prey. The word “...*straining toward what is ahead*” has similar meaning. It pictures the runner straining with every nerve and muscle as he keeps on running with all his might toward the goal.

Believers are living by the grace of God. Believers are saved by God’s grace and go to heaven by God’s grace. So what Paul means here by pressing on does not mean that we can save ourselves by our own effort, or that we can be victorious by our own effort. What he means by that is we are responsible to manage God’s grace in the best way we can.

Without God’s grace, there is no guarantee that we will be successful or not regardless of how hard we work and how hard we try. But in God’s grace, we are guaranteed to be successful when we press on. Proverbs 19:21 puts the truth this way, “*Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.*” So we press on with confidence of victory in God’s grace. That is what Paul means by his

word: *I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

We are not alone when we are in Christ. Christ is with us with His wisdom and almighty power. When we press on with Him, He guarantees victory.

So we don't need to turn our eyes to other things or any other man. We just need to fix our eyes upon Jesus and press on. Hebrews 12:2 says, *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfector 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.* Determine today to focus your eyes on Jesus only. Press on toward your goals with your eyes fixed on Jesus.