

Forgetting What Lies Behind

Philippians 3:12-15

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

In these verses Paul tells us the secrets of his success. His one thing I do really translates into two things—forgetting the past and reaching forward into the future. Paul indicated that in order for us to win the race that we are running we must have the ability to forget some things. We have to be able to forget the past and focus our gaze on the future.

This is strange because usually we are encouraged not to forget. “Don’t forget...”

A. There are many things that we are instructed not to forget or to remember.

1. We are not to forget the Lord (Deut. 8:11).
2. We are not to forget the covenant (Deut. 4:31; II Kgs. 17:38).
3. We are not to forget His commandments and precepts (Ps. 119:83, 141; Pro. 3:1).
4. We are not to forget the works of the Lord (Ps. 78:7).
5. We are not to forget all of His benefits (Ps. 103:2).
6. We are not to forget His word (Ps. 119:16).
7. We are not to forget to do good and share with others (Heb. 13:16).
8. We are not to forget that God’s timetable is not the same as our timetable (II Pet. 3:8-9).

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. –NIV

Sometimes when we are going through difficulty it is easy to forget what we should remember and dwell on what we should forget.

B. Forgetting is not a normal human ability (unless it is connected to a responsibility).

1. The dictionary defines the word “forget” in several ways.
 - a. To be unable to recall something that was previously known.
 - b. To fail to remember.
 - c. To fail to do something unintentionally or neglect.
 - d. To fail to take through forgetfulness.
 - e. To lose interest in or regard for; to overlook purposefully; to disregard.
 - f. To leave unmentioned or to fail to think of.

The last two of these meanings reflect more of what Paul was referring to when he instructed us to “forget.”

2. The New Testament word for “forget” means “to neglect or no longer care for.”

C. Forgetting means that we are to no longer nurture certain things in our mind.

1. There are certain things that we are to disregard and no longer care for in our minds.
2. There are certain things that we are not to let predominate our thinking or thought life.
3. There are certain things upon which we are not to fix our attention or gaze.
4. There are certain things that we are not to cultivate, water or feed.
5. There are certain things that we must let starve to death for lack of nourishment.

D. Forgetting involves the discipline of one’s thought life.

When Paul talked of forgetting, he did so in the context of a runner in a race. If a runner is going to be successful he must be focused on the goal and not allow his mind to be dominated by things that can only hinder him. He cannot be thinking about where the other runners are or how far he has come or who is in the stands. He can’t be focusing on what his wife said to him last night or what he will have for dinner. He has to focus on the race that is set before him.

Paul had many things to forget when it came to his personal race, including:

1. Christians that he had persecuted to death (Acts 8:3; 22:4; Phil. 3:6).
2. Blasphemy that he had uttered against the Lord (I Tim. 1:13).
3. Assisting at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1).
4. The rejection he experienced from the other apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 8:26).
5. The many disappointments, betrayals and heartaches caused by those to whom he ministered (II Cor. 4:8-12; II Tim. 1:15; 4:10).

Any one of these things could have been cared for and nurtured by Paul and could have hindered his progress or become a snare to him. Paul was not going to do this. He was going to look ahead. He made a conscious choice. He made it for the sake of his call and no one else could do it for him.

E. Forgetting means adopting the attitude of Joseph (Gen. 41:50-52).

And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

1. Joseph had to learn to forget his toil.
 - a. The word here used for "toil" literally means the following:
 - Heavy weary labor to the point of exhaustion.
 - The produce of labor.
 - Weariness, trouble, vexation.
 - Sorrow
 - b. The toil that Joseph had to forget involved bad experiences and betrayals.

There were times when it seemed that all of life was against him.

- His brothers sold him into slavery.
- Potiphar's wife made false accusations against him.
- Potiphar (whom he had served faithfully) put him into a common prison.
- The butler broke his promise to him to put in a good word for him.

2. Joseph had to grow from the negative experiences and become fruitful.

Joseph had pressed on in every situation. He didn't blame God or others for his plight. He saw the hand of God in his circumstance and believed that God had a purpose for his life. He became fruitful in the land of his affliction.

3. Joseph's naming of his children indicated the work had been done.

- a. His first child he named Manasseh (forgetting).
- b. His second child he named Ephraim (doubly fruitful).

When he did see his brothers again, he had the power to retaliate but he did not (Gen. 45:1-8; 50:19-20).

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive." Genesis 50:19-20

Closing

What is it that God wants you to forget? What needs to be forgotten before you can move forward into your future and destiny?

Perhaps it is some of your accomplishments (high school athletic, prom queen)

Perhaps it is some negative things:

- Is it...a terrible thing that you did in the past?
- Is it...a terrible thing that was done to you in the past?
- Is it...a statement that was made to you that you have let define you? (You'll never amount to anything!)
- Is it...being rejected, abandon, misrepresented, forsaken by someone important to you?
- Is it...false charges that have been raised against you?

Today we want to forget so we can reach forward.

Repeat this Prayer with me:

Heavenly Father,

I come to you this morning... thankful for the grace... that you have so freely given to me... based on fact that Jesus Christ died for my sins... and has

washed me clean... by His work on the cross... I thank you that you are a forgiving God... who faithfully forgives all my sins... when I come to you with sincerity of heart... and ask for your forgiveness... Today, I am asking for your forgiveness once again... I have asked you for forgiveness before,... but today I am receiving your forgiveness in a fresh way.

Today, I am receiving your forgiveness... with a commitment on my part... to forget those things that are behind.

I am receiving your forgiveness today... with the commitment to no longer... focus on the things that I cannot change.

I am receiving your forgiveness today... with a new determination... to live in the future and not in the past.

I am asking you for special grace and divine assistance... to let some things die for neglect and lack of attention... so that I can focus on the new life... and joyous future that you have prepared for me.

With the power of your grace...I choose to forgive those who have wronged me.

With the power of your grace...I choose to no longer dwell on hurtful things... said to me... or about me.

With the power of your grace...I choose to discipline my mind... and cast out wrong thinking.

With the power of your grace...I choose to believe the fact...that you can bring light out of darkness...life out of death...and a positive future...out of a negative past.

With the power of your grace...I choose to focus on the future...and stretch out toward your purpose for my life.

In Jesus' name