

GREATER BETHEL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH, INC.

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*“Investing in the Kingdom of God, by Sowing Seeds for the Saviour” – Matthew
13:24*

SERIES: REIMAGINING THE KINGDOM

**LESSON: FORGET THE PAST AND PRESS TOWARDS THE
GOAL**

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:12-14

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INTRODUCTION:

John Walvoord (Christian theologian): "On the one hand, discontent with one's spiritual life can bring discouragement and unnecessary resignation to spiritual defeat. On the other hand, in overestimating one's spiritual attainments, it is easy to become complacent with the measure of transformation which has taken place. Either alternative is falling short of the scriptural standard. What Paul is teaching in this section is that absolute perfection, such as that exists in heaven, is never achieved in this life. But there is the possibility of a high plateau of victory in Christ, of joy in the Spirit, and of the satisfaction of having served the Lord acceptably. It is this proper doctrine that the apostle is attempting to teach in this section."

Forgetting What Lies Behind

In 3:13, Paul writes that he is forgetting what lies behind him and straining forward to what lies ahead. The expression 'forgetting what lies behind' has a definite reference to his past life.

Forgetting though practically, very hard, simply means 'not to have remembrance of something.' It is humanly impracticable to erase all the memories both good and bad or positive and negative, or failure and success, or joy and suffering.

Forget the Past Mistakes

The second possibility is to forget his past mistakes of which he is convinced now. As an apostle, Paul, however, is sure about the forgiveness of the gracious Lord, who changed the directions of Paul and forced him to run a new race. He is also amply clear about the grace of God that is readily available to anyone who turns to God.

The chief thing Paul speaks about forgetting the past was forgetting his achievements and successes. This is the most difficult practice for any one of us to follow. We tend to harp on past successes.

Do Not Look Back

Another popular illustration is that the one who keeps the hand on the plow should not turn back. People who look backward keep on worrying about the past and forget that there is a hopeful future. They often fall prey to failure and defeat. We cannot completely forget the past.

Remembering the past and moving forward is different from hovering over the past. Here we do not allow the past to dominate and have control over our future possibilities.

Focus on the Upward Calling

This is true for our earthly calling and our upward spiritual growth. Of course, Paul dwells on the upward calling. He is not conveniently moving forward but stretching forward, which means moving with strain or moving forward beyond normal movement.

God's people cannot claim that they have reached perfection. Such a thought leads to saturation and stagnation. It deprives Christian dynamism.

Paul, when he started his apostleship felt that he was not worthy to be called an apostle. But later he became the chief of the apostles. May we resolve with the help of God to move forward and not hang over the past, particularly on the achievements?

Christ is the Goal

The mark or goal for Paul is Jesus Christ. It was not his choice, but Christ made him run towards it. Once this new target is set, Paul considered all the earlier achievements as losses and his righteousness as waste. Paul explains his new inescapable goal, Jesus, in different ways.

Paul wanted to get the mind of Jesus Christ, to be nearer to Jesus, to be like Jesus, grow up into Jesus, do the work of Jesus, put on the likeness of Christ, partake in the affection of Jesus, and share in the Joy of Jesus, to excel in the knowledge of Jesus Christ i.e., to know Jesus in all fullness. Therefore, for him to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Having been very definite about the goal, Paul is 'pressing on towards the goal. The expression "press on" is chasing. It is earnestly chasing to catch hold of something.

Unchangeable Determination

All these different shades of meaning suggest that Paul's determination to reach the goal was unchangeable.

We have two kinds of goals. One is our earthly goal, and the other is our spiritual goal. Often, we are caught up with our own goals and rarely find time to think about Jesus Christ, the most important goal. There is nothing wrong to pursue our own goals, but the priority is for Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you. In the life of Paul, there is only one goal that is Jesus Christ.

The distinction between the Goal and the Prize

Thirdly, Paul says he is pressing on 'for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.' Paul is clear about the distinction between goal and prize. The goal is reachable for everyone, but to get the prize there are strict rules and models. As the athletes strictly adhere to the model and rules, we need to follow them.

Paul's prize is to be ever happy with Jesus. He calls it the heavenly calling as well. The model was Jesus, and the rules are the word of God.

Strive for the Prize

The most striking illustration is when his disciples came and reported to him that they had cast out demons and healed the sick in the name of Jesus. Jesus' response was, yes, it is true, but see that your names are written in the book of life.

Jesus repeatedly reminded his disciples that there will be many in the kingdom who have gone before. Jesus used the example of constructing the house on the sand and rock. The goal is to construct the house.

But the prize is the house on the rock will not be destroyed. He also used the example of the wide and narrow gate. No one who follows the model – Jesus and the rules – the word of God, will miss the prize.

I will press on towards the goal and will not miss the prize. The prize is in the hand of God. Hence, we must lean on God, plead for his grace, and seek his strength and guidance.

Many of us are successful in reaching the goal, in some way, but let's be watchful about the prize. When we fully concentrate on the prize, our spiritual, moral, and earthly life will be different.

Love will be the guiding principle. Let's resolve that we will forget the past, we will press on towards the goal, and we will not miss the prize.