

Embarking Upon Tomorrow

Graduation 2005

Philippians 3:12-14

Preface

Illus: I read a story about a young man who was getting ready to graduate from college. For many months he had admired a beautiful sports car in a dealer's showroom, and knowing that his father could well afford it, he told him it was what he wanted for graduation. As graduation approached, the young man awaited signs that his father had purchased the car.

Finally, on the morning of his graduation, his father called him into his private study. His father told him how much he loved him. He handed his son a beautiful wrapped gift box. Curious but somewhat disappointed, the young man opened the box and found a lovely, leather bound Bible, with the his name embossed in gold.

Angrily, he raised his voice to his father and said, "With all your money you give me a Bible?" and stormed out of the house leaving the Bible.

Many years passed and the young man was very successful in business. He had a beautiful home and wonderful family, but realized the father was very old and realized he should go to him. He had not seen him since that graduation day. But before he could make arrangements, he received word that his father had passed away, and willed all of his possessions to his son. He needed to come home immediately to take care of things.

When he arrived at his father's house, sadness and regret filled his heart. He began to search through his father's important papers and found the still new Bible, just as he had left it years ago. With tears in his eyes, he opened the Bible and began to turn the pages. His father had carefully marked a verse, Matthew 7:11, "And if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father which is in heaven, give to those who ask Him."

As he read those words, a car key dropped from the back of the Bible. It had a receipt attached with the dealers name, the same dealer who had the sports car he had so desired. On the receipt was the date of his graduation, and the words, "PAID IN FULL."

God has many blessings in store for you. Do not make the mistake of missing them because they are not packaged as you expect them.

Our Lord rejoices with you in today's accomplishments. He has helped you and allowed you to reach this milestone.

God has a purpose for your life. If you are anything like me, you would like for him to send you a blueprint to review so you can approve or request changes.

We all know it doesn't work that way. We must travel the roads of adventure, for that is life. But we need not travel it alone or in fear.

Read Scripture

¹²Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:12-14 NAS

Introduction

These are the words of a great Christian who never let himself be satisfied with his spiritual attainments. Many Christians are self-satisfied because they compare their "running" with that of other Christians, usually the ones not making much progress. Paul did not compare himself with others; he compared himself with what God required of him and wanted for him through Jesus Christ.

Self evaluation can be dangerous, because we can err in two directions (1) making ourselves better than we are, or (2) making ourselves worse than we really are. Paul had no illusions about himself; he was determined to keep pressing forward in order to attain that which Christ intended for him.

So, how do you embark upon tomorrow? Through the analogy of an athlete, Paul gives us insight for having a successful future.

Content

1. Put Past Failures Behind You

If there was anyone who deserved to be haunted by his past, it was the apostle Paul. Paul had a wretched past of persecuting Christians and was largely responsible for the death of many Christians. Paul could have easily allowed his past to cripple him. But he did not!

Paul says in verse 13, *“forgetting what lies behind me and reaching forward to what lies ahead.”* Paul understood that the grace of God through salvation had cleansed him of his past. He understood that God was concerned with the present and future now that he was a child of God.

Success in the future begins with what we do with the past. So often, we are crippled and suffocated by our past deeds. Our past haunts us and serves as a nagging reminder that we can easily be a failure. It is a constant caution that we should not pursue our dreams and goals because we are unworthy. This is the way of the non-Christian only. This is not what God intends for His children.

God promises in Hebrews 10:17, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” This means, “I will no longer hold their sins against them. Their sins can no longer affect their standing with Me or influence My attitude toward them.” We must let past failures be the past just as God does.

Does this mean our past failures are just forgotten or denied? No! In the Bible, “to forget” does not mean “to fail to remember.” Apart from senility or a brain malfunction, no mature person can forget what has happened in the past. We may wish we could erase certain bad memories and behavior, but we cannot. In the Bible, “To forget” means to “no longer be influenced or affected by” the things of the past.

Like Paul, we must not allow our past mistakes to weight us down. Rather, we must let them become our inspiration to speed ahead with a successful future that glorifies God.

God has a way of turning our past into positive testimony. It becomes ok to acknowledge our past as it becomes a witness for what God has done in our life.

Perhaps you have been handicapped by your past. Perhaps you do not feel worthy to serve God or to take a stand for Him. Satan would love for you to keep thinking that way. But rest assured that is not God’s plan for you. God would have you forget what lies behind and reach forward to what lies ahead.

Don’t be shackled by regrets of the past. Don’t **try to run the race by looking backwards**. Look forward and make your journey!

2. Face The Future With Confidence

What will you do with the future? What will be your purpose and how will you approach tomorrow. Will you approach it with fear or confidence?

Illus: Max Lucado says, “Fear doesn’t want you to make the journey to the mountain. If it can rattle you enough, fear will persuade you to take your eyes off the peaks and settle for a dull existence in the flatlands.”

Paul acknowledges that he has not “laid hold” or “attained” what God has in store for him. However, notice the confidence in his words as he expresses his intent.

“but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Notice the use of the words, “one thing I do.” Believers must devote themselves to running the Christian race first and foremost. We must do so with confidence and discipline; letting nothing distract us.

To many Christians are trying be and do too many things rather than focusing on being who God wants them to be. God would have us face the future with confidence and purpose.

In 2 Timothy 1:7 Paul writes, “*For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.*” Courageous enthusiasm is essential in any kind of work. No matter what profession or goals you pursue, God can equip you if you keep your heart turned to Him.

God gives us power, love and discipline if we walk with him. God is less concerned about what profession you chose and more concerned about how you live for Him in everything you do.

The phrase, “I press” is the same verb translated “I follow after.” It carries the idea of intense endeavor. The Greeks used it to describe a hunter eagerly pursuing his pray.

Focus on the things you believe in your heart God wants you to do and press on, not with timidity. Face the future with power and confidence.

3. Focus on your most important relationship

It is important to put past failures behind you and face the future with confidence. But, the most important thing is to never lose focus on your most important relationship; your relationship with God.

It is your relationship with God that will hold everything else together. It is your relationship with God that will seal and keep all other relationships.

It is your relationship with God that will give you the confidence and power to keep going when things get tough. God can give you “stick-to-it-ness” when every bone in your body wants to give up.

Pursue your dreams for your careers and relationships. But always be growing in your relationship with God. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Christians put as much determination into their spiritual life as they do their careers, golfing, fishing and other activities?

There are two extremes to avoid: (1) “I must do it all” and (2) “God must do it all!” Both are recipes for failure.

No successful quarterback says to the team, “Listen to me and forget what the coach says.” Likewise, no successful quarterback says, “Sit back and let the coach do it all.”

You must read the Word, pray and ask for power from the Lord. You must let God work in you. God works in us so that He might work through us.

As you to pursue your dreams and goals, guard your most prized possession; your relationship with God. There will be those who will try to keep you from God. There will be those who will desire to pull you away from God. You must never, never allow that to happen.

We have all heard the saying, “misery loves company.” It is a true statement and “sin loves company.” Wherever your dreams take you remained focused on your relationship with God.

Conclusion

Illus: The poet John Greenleaf Whittier, once wrote: ‘For all the sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: ‘I might have been.’” The world is full of regret having thoughtlessly chosen the wrong path. Life has many forks and decisions. Your freedom will offer many choices. **And the consequences of your choices will belong to you.**

Embark upon tomorrow! Embark upon your journey but do so with the Lord as your traveling companion.