

Embarking Upon Tomorrow

Philippians 3:12-14
Graduation 2010

Preface

Illus: I read a story about a young man who was getting ready to graduate from college. For several 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 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.

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.

God has plans and a will for your life but not a blueprint in which you must follow every step. 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 others, usually the ones not making much progress. Paul did not compare himself with others; he compared himself with what God required of him and placed before him.

Self evaluation can be dangerous, because we can err in two directions (1) making ourselves out to be better than we are, or (2) making ourselves out to be worse than we really are.

Paul had no illusions about himself; he was determined to keep pressing forward 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 suffocated by our past deeds. Our past haunts us and serves as a nagging reminder that we can easily fail. 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 has.

This does not mean our past failures are just forgotten or denied? In the Bible, “to forget” does not mean “to fail to remember.” 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.

Illus: The Note: “T, All is forgiven. Love, Dad.” This is the message from our Heavenly Father. Don’t be shackled by regrets of the past. Don’t **try to run the race by looking backwards**. Look forward and embark upon tomorrow!

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 choose and more concerned about how you live for Him in your profession.

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. Press on, not with timidity but with the power of God and embark upon tomorrow!

3. Treasure 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 really difficult. 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 wisdom from the Lord. You must let God work in you.

As you 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. There will be those who try to get you to doubt God. You must never, never allow that to happen. You must guard with your life your relationship with God.

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

Treasure your relationship with God and embark upon tomorrow!

Conclusion

Illus: I was watching an episode of Andy Griffith the other night. Andy & Barney were in Raleigh for a meeting and they were eating at a fancy restaurant. They could not understand the French names of the dishes on the menu. Barney was too proud to ask what they meant so he just pointed to an item when he ordered. Andy on the other hand, put his pride aside and asked the waiter if any of those items were a steak. He ended up with exactly what he wanted; a delicious steak and baked potato. Barney ended up with clams, something he certainly didn't like.

Illus: Young people often say, “I am 18 or I am 21, I know what I am doing” or “I can do what I want.” When you really begin to reach maturity, you won't have to recite your age. Usually when you recite your age, you really don't know what you are getting into and you are rationalizing to get what you want.

You must understand that you do not know everything. As you travel life's adventures, you must be willing to swallow your pride and ask for directions. You must listen to the wisdom of godly people who have already been down many similar paths. You must listen to God and His word.

Illus: The poet John Greenleaf Whittler, 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 directions. Your freedom will offer many choices. **And the consequences of your choices will belong to you.**

Graduates, embark upon life as Paul did.

Put the failures of the past behind you and press on to what God has before you. Press on to the prize of discovering the life that can be through Christ Jesus.