

**“Stuck in the Future”
(Philippians 3:12-21)
Pastor Peter Yi
December 9th, 2007**

Introduction:

ESV Philippians 3:12-21 ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Most people get stuck in the past, not in the future. The past is where all of their mistakes happened. The past is where all those relationships went sour. The past is where poor financial decisions were made. The past is the place where tragedies happened. The past is where all the “What was I thinking?” moments happened.

And the past is also where all of our lifetime achievements were made. All of our straight A report cards were in our past. All our fondest and unforgettable moments, they all occurred in the past as well.

So it's not surprising that we get stuck in our pasts because that's all we've known. Every single moment of our lives, except this very instant, this moment of the present, has been lived out in our past. We don't know a moment of our future. It has yet to be lived out. But this is where God wants us to be stuck. He wants us to be firmly planted in His future. And that future is always bright because in the future is Christ. This is where he wants us to place our life goal. The way we get stuck in the future is my living out our lives in the present with that future in mind.

Last week we learned that the goal that Paul so passionately pursued was not a personal achievement or a pedigree, but rather a person. He didn't get caught up in all the things that he had done before or after he had become a Christian, rather, he set as his ultimate goal, to know Jesus deeply. His whole life purpose was to know a person, and that person was Jesus.

So if last week's message was about Christ being our goal, today's message is about how to go about that goal. What are the nuts and bolts of it?

So here's the first thing he shares.

**If we are to maintain knowing Christ as our life goal, it will require a heavy dose of reality.
(12a, 13a)**

When I look at Paul I consider him an idealistic realist.

You and I have all worked closely with pessimists. They're always doom and gloom. The sky is always falling. The glass is always half empty. And I know that's how God wired up some us, to me melancholy type of people. But I don't think this is a proper state of being for the Christian. God has done far too much for us to be pessimistic. He has loved us far too much for us to be constantly downcast. And the final chapter of God's history is going to be incredibly positive, especially for his sons and daughters.

And then there are idealists, also known as dreamers. And we need these dreamers. They always think of how life *should* be. They look at work, they look at relationships, they look at church, in an idealistic fashion. They keep us pragmatists in check. Pragmatists just want to get the job done, any way possible. Idealists are always asking, is this the right job. What is the best way to get it done?

Paul, and for that matter, all Christians, I believe need to be idealistic realists. Why? Because we know the ideal that God calls us to. He calls us to perfection. He calls us to an incredibly high standard of holiness. We know the ideal of the heaven and earth that will come when Jesus returns. But at the same time we live in reality and to live in reality we have to be realists. We know the reality of our sinful nature. We know the reality of a real devil that intends us and all of mankind real harm. We know that this side of heaven we will not reach perfection.

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect,

¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own.

And that is what Paul is showing us. He's saying. Have an ideal goal. Keep in your mind at all times a picture of the ideal. Complete knowledge of Christ is the ideal goal, but realize that it will not be achieved in this lifetime. Realize that there will be setbacks. Realize that we're sinful. So do we throw in the towel knowing we're pursuing an unattainable goal? Do we give up after a period of time if we don't see some progress? Absolutely not. You and I can pursue a goal that will never see its completion until we see Jesus face to face. So that's the first thing. Be an idealistic realist.

The second thing we learn is this.

Maintaining the goal of knowing Christ requires the proper motivation. (12b).

A lofty goal requires lofty motivation. The lure of wealth and all the alleged pleasures and benefits we receive once we attain it have caused many people to give up everything, health, family, relationships for it.

I hope we can all agree at this point that knowing Christ is a lofty goal. But we can only maintain the goal if we are properly motivated. Here's how Paul states it.
but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

His motivation for wanting to know Christ so deeply is because Christ Jesus gave him new life. When you look at the life of Paul in the book of Acts and throughout his letters, his assurance, confidence, and his motivation for living the type of life he did, and encouraging others to do the same, was the Damascus Road.

Acts 9:1 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 Now as he

went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" 5And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 6But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." 7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. 8Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. 9And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

Later on in Acts, whenever Paul has the chance, he shares his testimony of what Jesus did for him on the road to Damascus.

Look at the powerful way in which Paul describes his conversion in verse 12.

The ESV just says he took me as his own, but the language is much stronger than that. There is the connotation of grasping, seizing, to take possession of. He's clutching and grabbing after Jesus, because Jesus clutched and grabbed him.

Just as with a drowning man, whose life has been saved, we would expect him to repay the debt of gratitude. With us more important that our own physical lives is our souls and it was Christ who rescued and saved out souls.

Next, if we are to maintain knowing Christ as our life goal, it will require that we forget the past.

But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

These two clauses (forgetting and straining) describe what he does in verse 14, "I press on..." The imagery Paul is using here is of a race. Whether an athlete is running a 100-meter race or a lengthy marathon, he or she does not have the luxury to look behind them. An athlete doesn't dwell on all the distance that's been covered so far. In fact a sprint that takes a little over nine seconds you don't even have time to think about the past 10, 20, 50 meters. You only have your eyes set on the tape, the finish line.

- 1) forgetting, neglect, overlook, care nothing about. What lies behind is the path already trod. The part of the race already run. What exactly are we to be forgetting? It's part of the Christian race, so it must be things in our Christian past only. "he will not allow either the achievements of the past (which God has wrought) or, for that matter, his failings as a Christian to prevent his gaze from being fixed firmly on the finish line." (Obrien 429).
- 2) Straining forward, is to conjure the imagery of a person who stretches out his chest and lunges forward to hit the tape and cross the finish line.

And that's the manner in which we need to live our lives.

If we get stuck in our pasts, it will paralyze us from not only setting Christ as our goal, but also in making progress in attaining Him.

God has already forgotten our pasts and we do this great disservice to him in reminding him and ourselves of it over and over again. All the mistakes we've made, all the moral failures, all the trials and hurdles, all the besetting temptations and habitual sins...when we keep dwelling on these things, it will only hinder and paralyze us from moving forward to become what God desires for each of us. What you and I need to do is make a clean break with whatever has happened in the past. There is nothing you and I can do to go back and change the past. The past is there for

the purpose of forgetting it. Look toward the finish line, look toward Christ. The author of Hebrews said it like this. Fix your eyes upon Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.

If we are to maintain knowing Christ as our life goal, it will require rigorous effort.

12b “but I press on to make it my own,”

13 But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

¹⁴ I press on toward the goal

In verse 13, Paul says the words, “But one thing I do.” Isn’t that interesting? He doesn’t say here are the three steps to achieving your goals. He says there is one and only one thing to do. The problem with many of us is that we have a plurality of goals, isn’t it? I want to enjoy freedom of singleness and the pleasures of marriage. I want to advance in my career and pursue my hobbies. I want to be a good Christian and be filthy rich. I want to make great strides in my faith and pursue a comfortable lifestyle. Do you know how the bible defines a person who has a plurality of life goals? An idolater. An idol worshipper. Isn’t that true? Doesn’t the bible say we shall worship God alone? Doesn’t it say we can’t serve both God and money? Doesn’t it say we’re to love God w/ all our heart soul mind and strength?

Friends, if you and I truly want to make Christ our goal, he really needs to be our only goal. We need to make family, work, leisure, money, whatever a means to know Christ. And whatever gets in the way of that goal, we must shed off.

In addition, the words used here are words such as pressing and straining. These are words that imply training, effort, determination, sweat, and tears. We will never realize this goal, unless we are willing to make the sacrifice. Sacrifice has never been foreign to Christians. It has always been a part of the package. You and I must be willing to make the necessary sacrifices to realize the goal of knowing Christ.

Finally, Having this as our goal and redirecting our lives toward this goal is a sign of spiritual maturity.

¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

We can say that a person who’s been a Christian ten years is mature. Or we can say a person who’s read his bible five times is mature. Or we can say that a person who’s served the church for a season or more is mature. Or we can say that a person who prays regularly is mature. Or we can say that a person who doesn’t sin that often is mature. And I agree, that all of these things can be signs of a person’s spiritual maturity. But I so appreciate how Paul cuts through all the distraction, all the clutter, all the smoke screens, and says it the way he says it.

If Christ is your goal and if you’re on the journey of knowing and loving Jesus, you’re on your way to spiritual maturity. If you and I resonate with Paul and the things that he’s written in Philippians 3, then we’re on the way to spiritual maturity. Because the word to “think” or have this attitude, which appears several times in this letter, (1:7; 2:2,5; 3:19;4:2,10) has to do with a person’s whole disposition or direction in life. So when Paul is saying think this way, he’s really saying, LIVE this way.

Conclusion:

Friends this is how we live out a life that desires more than anything else, a passionate desire to know our Saviour.

