Central Idea: Because the Christian life is a forward-moving pursuit of Christ, we must let go of the past, stay focused on spiritual priorities, and endure faithfully until we reach the eternal prize.

INTRODUCTION

- The apostle Paul wrote to the saints in Philippi while imprisoned, yet his tone is filled with purpose, determination, and hope. Instead of dwelling on past failures or present hardships, Paul models a forward-leaning faith: "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead."
- His words challenge us to consider what we are pursuing most earnestly. Are we spiritually stagnant, distracted, or burdened by what God has already forgiven?
- Or are we pressing forward with focused determination toward the heavenly prize? As disciples, we are called to run the race with endurance and keep our eyes fixed on Christ.

OBJECTIVES

1. Forgetting What Is Behind
2. Reaching Forward with Purpose
3. Pressing Toward the Prize

1. FORGETTING WHAT IS BEHIND

Philippians 3:13

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,

CONTEXT - What did Paul Forget

Philippians 3:4–6 ESV

though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Philippians 3:7–9 ESV

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

A. Letting Go of Past Sins and Failures

- God's forgiveness cleanses us completely

1 John 1:7–9 ESV

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- Paul himself was once a persecutor, yet he refused to let his past define his future.

1 Timothy 1:12–16 ESV

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

- Christians must not allow guilt to paralyze spiritual progress.

B. Releasing Past Successes and Achievements

- Spiritual victories are good, but they must not create complacency

1 Corinthians 10:12 ESV

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

- Yesterday's faithfulness does not replace today's obedience.

2. REACHING FORWARD WITH PURPOSE

A. Setting Our Minds on Heavenly Things

- "Set your mind on things above" (Col. 3:1–2).
- A purposeful Christian life requires disciplined focus, not spiritual drifting

Hebrews 2:1 ESV

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

B. Growing into Spiritual Maturity

- We are called to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Pet. 3:18).
- The church builds itself up in love as each member matures (Eph. 4:14–16).

C. Pursuing a Christ-Centered Life

- Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and follow Him (Luke 9:23).
- Our priorities must align with His kingdom (Matt. 6:33).

3. PRESSING TOWARD THE PRIZE

Philippians 3:14 ESV

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

A. The Prize: Eternal Life with God

- The "upward call" refers to the eternal reward promised to the faithful (2 Tim. 4:7–8).
- Our citizenship is in heaven

Philippians 3:20–21 ESV

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 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.

B. The Need for Perseverance in the Christian Race

- The Christian life is pictured as a race requiring endurance (Heb. 12:1–2).
- We must remain faithful until death (Rev. 2:10).

C. Pressing On Despite Obstacles

- Paul pressed on despite suffering, hardship, and imprisonment

2 Corinthians 4:7–10 ESV

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

CONCLUSION

- Paul's words remind us that the Christian journey is forward-looking, Christ-focused, and eternally hopeful.
- We cannot move toward the prize while chained to the past.
- We cannot mature if we lose sight of our purpose. And we cannot finish the race if we stop pressing on.

More spiritual growth is often forged through failure, disappointment, hardship, and tears than ever discovered through success, laughter, comfort, or trivial pursuits.