

Living Toward a Goal that Lasts  
Philippians 3:7-12                      2025

### Philippians 3:7-16 (New Revised Standard Version)

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard 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 one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow, I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

I remember hearing a pastor tell this story, several years ago,  
about a young farm boy who was given a new BB gun for his birthday.  
And as is the way of young boys who get new BB guns,  
he was shooting at anything and everything in sight,  
which unfortunately included his mother's favorite prize duck.

Somehow, he managed to hit that duck in an especially vital spot,  
which then, quacked twice and keeled over dead --- he'd killed it.

Now he's in big trouble and he knows it --- and so he panics.  
But looking all around carefully and seeing no one in sight,  
he drags the duck back behind the barn and buries the bird.

Later at dinner, his father asks about the missing duck,  
had anyone seen anything or know what happened to this prize duck ?  
The son was afraid, guilty and ashamed, and he didn't speak up.

A farmhand had been hired to help out and do chores at the farm.  
After dinner, the farmer's son was surprised, shocked even,  
when the hired hand quietly ordered him to fill the wood box.

The boy protested indignantly, "No way. That's your job,"  
to which the hired hand answered with six magic words,  
**"I saw you .... bury the duck."**

So it went on for the next few days,  
that the boy kept the wood box stacked and filled.

But as time went on, realizing that he had the upper hand over the boy,  
the hired hand began shifting more and more of his work, to the son,

and anytime he complained or made argument,  
he would simply whisper under his breath,  
**"Quack, quack ... remember the duck."**

This arrangement of exploitation went on for several weeks,  
and the boy was worn being ragged by all that extra work  
of doing both the hired hand's chores, in addition to his own,  
and worst of all, he didn't feel much like a son anymore,  
because he felt so sneaky and guilty around his father.

So, in his weariness, shame and frustration,  
he decided it would be better to confess,  
and just face whatever punishment his father required,  
rather than continuing to serve as the hired hand's slave -  
**and most of all he wanted to feel like he was his father's son again.**

So, the boy went to his father and told him what he had done,  
and he explained how ashamed he was and sorry for lying.

The father, though disappointed, understood, and forgave the boy.  
Their relationship was restored with tears and a long hug,  
and at last, he felt like his father's beloved son once again.

When the hired hand came to remind the boy to fill the wood box,  
the son, with his relationship now restored, boldly refused.  
So then he whispered, "Quack, quack ... remember the duck."

The boy replied, "I just finished telling my father about the duck.  
I confessed, he forgave me, **and you can't hold that over me anymore.**  
I am my father's son again, so you fill the wood box,  
and by the way, he'd like to have a word with you."

Back during the Middle Ages,  
the Black Plague killed off almost half of Europe.  
When Martin Luther was young and just getting started as a monk,  
he volunteered to help care for victims dying from the plague.

Years later he wrote, that he'd hoped to die doing this work,  
for surely doing such good works would warrant salvation -  
tipping the balance and outweighing his sin.

But he found that even risking his own life for the sake of others,  
did nothing to help reduce his sense of guilt, shame and remorse.  
**Martin Luther struggled with feeling worthy & certain of God's grace.**

Despite the Lord God's promises and assurances to forgive our sins,  
sometimes we too still allow mistakes, failures & sins of our past  
to echo and haunt us, letting our shame and guilt still trouble us  
into trying to desperately & incessantly to atone for the past.

But the Apostle Paul has a better idea, as he writes in **vs. 13-14**,

... but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus...

Our God intends for us to live free and joyfully fulfilled lives.

But sometimes we Christians live and act as if,  
there's a dead duck secretly buried behind the barn -  
as if, by doing extra chores or by being a good & busy Christian  
that will tip the balance & outweigh our regret & guilt of sin.

Paul's letter to the Philippians addresses that false premise.

By the time Paul wrote this, he was an older and well-tested man.

He had traveled & endured many long years and miles of ministry.  
Having endured struggle and adversity, persecution, attack & loss,  
and he'd learned **to trust fully the steadfast faithfulness of God.**

He's still very passionate, but some of his youthful self-assurance  
had been replaced with a more humble and reflective sense of trust  
and much more dependent on God's grace rather than in himself.

**Having looked back over his life, his accomplishments and mistakes  
he's got a better sense of what was truly important & significant.**

Many of the things that we see as important and critical in our youth,  
are knocked off by life, leaving a wisdom of what matters and lasts.  
It's that same perspective of **the wisdom that comes with experience**,  
that helps explain the message of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

The Apostle knew from his own life and his own experience  
that to tie God's gracious love to human effort and behavior  
was a false and **spiritually destructive** dangerous teaching.

**Paul knew that what makes us holy, worthy and acceptable to God ---**  
is not our human effort or our spiritual achievements  
nor is it our good works or our goodness or religious ritual,  
**but it is solely and purely by God's grace alone...**

**... and any other stuff --  
anything other than seeking to know, love and walk with God  
will be a distraction away from what truly matters most.**

Back on the road to Damascus as Saul,  
Paul was found, claimed, renamed and called by Jesus Christ,  
which completely reordered his life, his focus and goals,  
away from whatever religious credentials he'd achieved,  
toward a total dependency & trust in God's grace alone.

His chief goal from then on was both to know & to grow in Jesus Christ,  
which meant dismissing self-achievements he didn't need. vs. 10-11

**I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his  
resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there  
was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it. (The Message)**

Paul was rejecting and throwing out his former credentials as trash,  
so that instead, he could commit entirely to his walk with Christ.

So, he eagerly abandoned it all, in order to gain Christ,  
**switching from the ladder of the law to the elevator of grace.**

Lent is a good time for us to re-evaluate our lives and faith journey,  
opportunity to reflect on our lives & the direction we're traveling,  
the burdens we carry that can restrain & hold us back  
from the blessings and good that God intends for us.

It's God desire for us to live free and joyfully fulfilling lives,  
not supposing that by doing extra-Christian-chores and deeds  
will somehow tip the balance and outweigh the guilt of our sin,  
or that God will love us more, if we are more religious,  
& more focused on accomplishing good works to impress.

Now, reflecting in prison at the twilight of his life & ministry,  
Paul's driving ambition was an ever-closer walk with Christ,  
and to unload & ignore all that other religious stuff that hinders  
and distracts from having a true & growing relationship with Jesus.

This is important and most critical for us to hear and to absorb,  
that it's not the mistakes we make **that holds us back,**  
and it's not the success we achieve **that raises us up.**  
BUT it's only the call of Jesus, the power of God's gracious love,  
and that alone is what ultimately and really matters at the end.

Therefore,  
Paul says, forget what lies behind – both the good and the bad.  
Instead press on ahead, and strain forward on tippy toes  
toward whatever God desires and intends for our future,  
so, our faith can heal and transform, be real and vital.

As Paul explains it, vs. 7-8,

Yet whatever gains I had; these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that,  
I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his  
sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain  
Christ.

During this season of Lent especially,  
the question and challenge that I most need to ask is this,  
reflecting on my own spiritual journey and my own life of faith,  
is growing deeper and closer with Jesus truly **my first priority?**

Is that my driving ambition, or am I settling for something far less?  
**Is my focus on the right things, on things that really matter most?**

We need to understand that trouble-free ease and comfort,  
that stagnation and rust are never God's plan or will for us.

**God is about changing and growing our faith and Christian character,**  
for we are always in the process of being reshaped and reconfigured.

At the Lord's Table of grace today reflect anew on God's love for you.

The point is not that we just arrive in God's Kingdom of Heaven,  
but that our relationship with God develops well along the way.

God's embrace comforts and guides us through all our tribulation,  
for our God knows and loves us, and will never, never abandon us,  
and the sure promise is that God is always still with us,  
not merely to survive, **but to walk in joy of victory.**

As we read in the meditation earlier today from Isaiah, vs. 43:1, 18-19

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, **you are mine.** Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? **I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.**