

Phil. 3:13-14 *Brethren, 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, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Intro: I've been thinking, have you ever noticed that in your car, you have to adjust your rear view mirror but never your windshield? And, have you ever noticed how much bigger your windshield is compared to your rearview mirror?

Why? Because where you're going is more important than where you've been. Yet how many Christians spend the majority of their drive on life's highway looking back instead of looking ahead?

Question: How much of your life do you spend looking back in fear and regrets about your yesterdays, instead of living your today's to the fullest and preparing for your tomorrows should you be allowed to see them? I would like to spend some time today looking at some suggestions about

Changing a Dismal Past into a Dynamic Present

I want to think about 3 specific things today: First, God's plan, then, the dangers we face, and finally, the needed corrective actions. So let's begin with

A. God's plan

God has (always has had) a purpose, will, destiny for your life. It is laid out in His words to Israel and to us as well, in Jeremiah. 29:11 from the *Msg. I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for.*

Of course, we've all made wrong turns, gotten off track, sped up when we should've slowed down and we've missed some exits all together, not to mention going the wrong way on a few one-ways. And yet, our purpose or destiny is not the wrong turns or bad decisions; Rather, it's about getting back on track, and headed in the direction God has ordained.

Thought: The danger of spending too much time looking in the rearview mirror is, we can crash into, or completely miss what's right in front of us. We can learn from past mistakes (or victories). We can even take a quick look to make sure what's in our past doesn't creep up on us but don't park there or continue to drive while constantly looking back there.

Thought: Its when we are tempted to park there or drive with our eyes mainly on the rear view mirror that we have regrets. (Daily Bread, December 31, 1988 tells us this story of William Borden.

"In 1904 William Borden, heir to the Borden Dairy Estate, graduated from a Chicago high school. His parents gave him a trip around the world. Traveling through Asia, the Middle East and Europe gave Borden a burden for the world's hurting people.

Writing home, he said, 'I'm going to give my life to prepare for the mission field.' When he made this decision, he wrote in the back of his Bible two words: No Reserves. Turning down high paying job offers, after graduation from Yale University, he entered two more words in his Bible: No Retreats.

Completing studies at Princeton Seminary, Borden sailed for China to work with Muslims, stopping first at Egypt for some preparation. While there he was stricken with cerebral meningitis and died within a month. A waste, you say! Not in God's plan. In his Bible underneath the words No Reserves and No Retreats, he had written the words **No Regrets**.

So God has a plan for us and that plan is one for success and a home with him when its all over, He wants us to be able to write, like William Borden, No Regrets concerning the journey

Question: So what about the here and now?

B. The dangers we face or practice

Too often we fret so much over our past that it brings on, things like Depression, Ulcers, Discouragement, Hopelessness, Lack of trust, Fear, Unhappiness, and Feelings of inadequacy

Question: From your experience, would you say that is a fair statement??

Have you noticed that

- Many times, in looking back, we may be unwilling to forgive ourselves,
- We may be unwilling to forgive others their mistakes,
- We may suffer from a martyr complex and be unwilling to admit that a situation has changed for the better
- We may wish to hang on to the bad, indulge in self-pity, etc.

- We may have become condescending or intolerant toward others who "have not had it as rough" as we have. **Or**
- We may be so accustomed to dealing with problems that we have fallen prey to negativism.
- Our primary emphasis may be on obstacles rather than opportunities - In other words, we may see the glass half-empty, rather than half-full, etc.

Lets think a moment about how good things from the past can also hinder us in achieving the dynamic present we desire to attain.

As we look back we may miss the present opportunities because

- We may be complacent -- resting on our laurels, hindered by pride and self-satisfaction.
- We may be overconfident because of successes in the past
- We may wrongly assume that what "worked" in the past will do so now.
- We may be tired from successful work in the past and have a tendency to slacken our effort in the present.

Thought: The past is behind, learn from it. The future is ahead, prepare for it. The present is here, live it.

Life is full of change -- we must be adaptable. We must be able, whether the past holds good or bad memories, to say: "***That was then, this is now.***"

We must, on the one hand, be able to learn from bad experiences without letting them hinder us - and, on the other hand, be grateful for good experiences without letting them hinder us.

According to Yogi Berra's quip, "The wonderful thing about young people is that they have their whole future ahead of them." So do all of us!

Jan Glidewell sums it up this way **Quote** "You can clutch the past so tightly to your chest that it leaves your arms too full to embrace the present."

The philosopher Santayana said "Those who cannot remember the past, are condemned to repeat it,"

So if we do not want to get stuck in the past, whether good or bad, I want to think briefly about

C. The needed corrective actions to help us have a dynamic present

- First lets think about eight questions we can ask that will help us overcome mistakes we have made so we can experience a more dynamic present

When we look back on a bad situation we need to ask

1. What was my original motive?
2. What did I do?
3. When did I do it?
4. What happened?
5. Why did this happen?
6. How can I change the mistake?
7. What will I do differently?
8. How well will I do it the second time?

- Secondly lets ponder Stevenson's list of rules

Over a century ago, Robert Louis Stevenson devised a number of rules to help people to live happier, more productive lives. These rules may be a century or more old, but they are still excellent guidelines. He wrote:

1. Make up your mind to be happy - learn to find pleasure in simple things.
2. Make the best of circumstances. No one has everything, and everyone has something of sorrow.
3. Don't take yourself too seriously.
4. Don't let criticism worry you - you can't please everybody.
5. Don't let your neighbors set your standards - be yourself.
6. Do things you enjoy doing, but stay out of debt.
7. Don't borrow trouble. Imaginary things are harder to bear than actual ones.
8. Since hate poisons the soul, do not cherish enmities and grudges.
9. Avoid people who make you unhappy.
10. Have many interests. If you can't travel, read about places.
11. Don't hold postmortems or spend time brooding over sorrows and mistakes.
12. Don't be the one who never gets over things.
13. Keep busy at something. A very busy person never has time to be unhappy.

In doing these it will assist us in having the dynamic present that the Lord desires for us.

As I conclude, Let me go over again, some key thoughts. **REMEMBER**

1. We cannot live in the past. We may visit there, but to live there is to die.
2. We can leave the past but we cannot erase it.
3. The past cannot be erased **but it can be forgotten.**

Thought: We are to forget the past in the sense that we do not allow our past failures, hurts, and disappointments to keep us from experiencing God's best for our lives today.

4. Don't allow your past (successes or failures) to hold you hostage.
5. Never forget, God's grace is a key to deliverance.
6. Forgetting the past is a deliberate act of our purpose and will. We leave it behind intentionally. We banish it from our thoughts. We deliberately disregard it. We choose to deliberately cease to remember. Paul uses the word "count all things loss" etc. He "considered" them gone.
7. Robert Louis Stevenson said, "Make up your mind to be happy - learn to find pleasure in simple things." He said, "Since hate poisons the soul, do not cherish enmities and grudges" and "Don't hold postmortems or spend time brooding over sorrows and mistakes." He also said, "Don't be the one who never gets over things."
- 8 . God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit is available resources to anyone who "with purpose of heart" will seek the joy and freedom of "forgetting those things which are past."

Thought: The reason why some people are failing in life is because they are living in the past with their eyes glued to the rear view mirror instead of looking out of the windshield

We must learn how to let go of the past! * *Paul says, "Forgetting those things which are behind ..."* This means we put our greatest efforts into making the present a dynamic time in your life and in that process getting ready for the future, rather than living in the past!