

Overcoming an Unhappy and Unproductive Past

Philippians 3:12-14

Intro. What is there about our past that has such a profound impact on our lives and where we are today? It is because in large part we are products of our yesterdays. Some of them have had a past history that is conducive to providing courage and spirit to carry on well in this rough and tumble world that they find themselves in today.

However I would suggest that a majority of us have a past that is less than the best whereby we could be encouraged, but rather, one that leads to discouragement and hopelessness.

God wants us to have our days filled with learning, with victories and success in our ministries, and for our Christian lives to be filled with a vision of a future that is bright and fulfilling. Since that is the case, what must we do to remove the shackles that bind us so that we can enjoy our freedom in Christ?

I . What causes an unhappy and unproductive past?

A. Fear to try new things

Man has a vast capacity to try new things. If you don't believe that, just look at the new inventions and gadgets that we buy just to try them out. But for true joy and productivity in our lives, we are often hindered by a fear of trying new things for Christ.

That's why these following words are heard so many times in churches actually, more in churches than in any other sector of society. We've never done it that way before, It won't work, or we've always done it like this. That is the main reason the church is always having to play catch up and then crying about the state of the world.

It has somehow equated trying new things with changing the gospel when, in actuality, it is changing the way we present the Gospel in a changing world. If businesses were as fearful of trying new things in order to do business as the church is there would be few places for us to shop at

B. Fear because of past mistakes

There are those that have mustered up the courage to venture out and they tried something and they failed. And out of this failure some people find themselves fretting over their mistakes rather than using them as stepping stones to further victories.

C . Living to have fun rather than planning for success

The story is told of a man that ended up in Folsom prison. As a young man he lived with his mother and one of her great loves in life was to read and yet for some reason, a physical problem caused her to go blind. But as this boy matured, he was torn between staying with her and flexing his wings like other young guys. So the world and all its pleasures beckoned to him and finally he chose the world.

But as he became more entangled in it and as he got with the wrong crowd he decided to make a yet another change. He decided to return home and read to his mother and care for her. And so one evening he walked in the door with his heart full of good intentions and there was his mother sitting in a chair with a book on her lap waiting for someone to read to her. The only problem was that she was dead, time was gone, his opportunity had vanished.

And so this young man, was filled with guilt and remorse and he finally ended up in Folsom prison. But the story doesn't end there After a stint in the slammer he was released and right away he went to an old folks home to see if there was anyone there that he could read to in hopes of recapturing some of the lost opportunity and blessings.

His ministry started with reading to an old lady who subsequently died one evening as he read to her. So while one opportunity was missed with his mother, another one was captured with this elderly lady.

That's the way it is with us. We miss opportunities but unlike this young man we are often afraid to venture out again. We fear our mistakes, and our failures dog our lives and for many of us, the past was just a time of fun rather than building for the future and eternity.

But whatever it was in our past, God wants to heal us so that we can go on to great victories in the future. Some has wisely said, Never let a bleak past becloud a bright future.

II. What this unhappy past does for us.

A. Limits our desire for spiritual adventure.

How about you, are you afraid to venture out for Christ? Are you afraid to try new ministries because you feel that you might fail?

B. We limit our spiritual victories

Do you realize God has saved you so that He can develop you into a servant that He can use in a victorious way to reach others, and touch their lives for Christ?

I have made plenty of mistakes in my past, but with each passing day, if I will only look, I gain new vision about who I am in Christ. It was Christ that called me or chose me in the first place and His choice was made in spite of my past.

C. Limits our future learning potential

When an unhappy past stops us from trying new areas of ministry, it actually stops us from learning, because we no longer are experiencing new things.

The old adage is very true. Experience is the best teacher. The question is, are you setting on your future adventure, and learning because of failures that have happened in your past?

III. What we have to do to overcome an unhappy and unproductive past?

A. Philippians 3:13 says forget the things that are behind. The early church father, Crystom said, what profit to us is the past if it be not completed?

In other words, what profit is the starters pistol unless we cross the finish line, and we can't cross the finish unless we forget the starting line once the gun goes off and we concentrate on reaching the finish one.

Forget your mistakes, forget your fears. See yourself in the thick of the race and give it all you've got.

The poet says it this way:

Look not back on yesterday
So full of failure and regret
Look ahead and seek God's way
All sin confessed you must forget

And yet another poet said it like this

The past is o'er-
Waste not thy days in vain regret,
Grieve thou no more.

Look now before
And not behind thee; do not fret-
The past is o'er

Close memory's door;
That day is dead, that sun has set-
The past is o'er.

There are in store
For thee still happy days. Forget!
Grieve thou no more.

To rid yourself of, or to overcome, your unhappy past and build for the future, forget what is behind, except to learn from its experience, so you can do better next time.

B. Reach forth V 13

The Danish sculptor, Bertel Thorvaldson, who died in **1884**, was asked at one point in his life, Sir, which of your statues was the greatest and in just three words he summed up the essence of this phrase in V 13 when he replied, *the next one*.

Reaching forth reminds me of the 100 meter dash in the Olympics. If you have ever watched one you will notice as the runners strain towards the finish they lean forward in order to finish first.

This is what overcoming the past, is all about. Forgetting the failures of the past and reaching, or leaning forth with renewed zeal and strengthened faith towards new things.

But Paul gives us yet a third component to use in overcoming the depths of despair, that our enemy would like to keep us in, and this third thing is

C. To press on V 14

Napoleon once said opportunities are born and die in the same day. There is time to win a victory before the sun goes down.

My friend maybe you are here and your yesterdays have been filled with frustrations and discouragements, but I want you to know that if we will press on to the high ground, there is yet time for us to win a victory in Christ because He wants us to be accomplishers for His kingdom.

He wants us to climb the stairs leading to emotional and spiritual victories but if we don't press on, we will not hit the mark that God believes that we can hit with His help.

Again the poet's pen writes to us in these words,

When I have failed, I need
you Lord, To teach this lesson clear:
If I but learn and try again,
Success is always near

We must always remember this one fact. In Christ, defeat can never rob us of true success.

IV. What we enjoy once we get over the bad things in our past. First,

A. We can be more daring for Christ

In Joshua. 14:6-13 we find a fellow that was a daring overcomer and his name was Caleb.

V 10 tells us that this day was a special birthday because Caleb turned 85 yrs. old.

Do you think that Caleb ever made any mistakes in those 85 yrs.? I would suspect that he made his share. But lets see his attitude and daring in the response that he gave. At 85 yrs. of age he said, V 11 *"I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in.*

And now in V 12 he says with great enthusiasm GIVE ME THIS HILL COUNTRY or in other words GIVE ME THIS MOUNTAIN!! Caleb had made his share of mistakes but he had overcome and now he dared to say, give this mountain to me.

What is there that God has given you to do? Does He want you to climb the mountain of maturity and victory? Can you echo these words of Caleb and dare to say give me these mountains?

B. We are victorious in Christ

The past has no hold on us. Once things are washed in the blood of forgiveness then we can claim the passage in Romans 8:37.

V 35 says *Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or are hungry or cold or in danger or threatened with death?*

And now V 37 as Charles Williams translates it, *and yet in all these things we keep on gloriously conquering through Him that loved us.*

C. We are comforted by Christ.

Once again Lamentations 3:22,23 becomes real. They say *The unfailing love of the LORD never ends! By his mercies we have been kept from complete destruction. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day.*

Lets take yesterday's failures, subtract the lessons learned through them, and then lets put them into the sea of God's forgiveness as well as the sea of His forgetfulness.

Just as yesterday's blessings are stale. So yesterday's failures are also stale food for us. God gives new blessings each day and he also gives new opportunities for success in which we can receive His new blessings.

I Thessalonians 5:18 says *in everything give thanks.* And we can give thanks each day that the failures of our yesterday's do not need to control us today.

It can be summed up like this: don't let an unhappy and unsuccessful past rob you of a bright, vigorous, and victorious future. Lets dare to press on, lest we find ourselves resting and later rusting away with fear which would be most unproductive.

There is a story told of a monument high in the Alps that was placed as a memorial to a mountain guide and inscribed on this plaque were the words (He died climbing)

I trust that on our journey toward Christian maturity we will not be deterred by the failures of yesterday but instead we will be faithful climbers,

May our plaque one day read, they died climbing.

One closing thought Before you think about climbing any mountains be sure you have the right guide to lead the way. You can find Him be reading and acting on these next few lines. Then go forward and upward.

Realize you are a sinner Romans 3:23

Understand that the payday for sin is death or eternal conscious separation from God.
Romans 6:23a

Know that there is a way of escape for you. Romans 6:23b and John 1:12

Desire to escape and pray this or a similar prayer.

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I am truly sorry for my sins, and I confess them all to You [name them]. Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins and come into my heart as my Saviour and Lord. I receive You right now. Help me from this time forward to live for You. Thank You for hearing and answering my prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen."

On the _____ day of _____ I became a Christian by inviting Jesus Christ into my life to forgive my sin.

Signed: _____

If you have further questions or have chosen to do this, be sure to let us know so we can help you, pray for you and encourage you in your new life.

You can reach us at lapeerchurch@gmail.com Subject line: (Salvation)