

## “DON'T LOOK BACK, LOOK FORWARD”

Text: Philippians 3:12-15

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### INTRODUCTION:

1) A fabricated story: A man was gradually losing his memory power, so, he went to seek medical advice. A doctor offered him a plan to stop the process of losing memory, but he also said there was a high risk that may come with the procedure: the man might become blind. The doctor told him to think about it for a few days to make his decision. When he came back to see the doctor again, the man told the doctor that he won't go with the procedure because he wanted to be able to see what lies ahead of his life, that is more important than to remember what had happened in his life in the past. While this may not be a true story, it offers good principle of life: The value of life isn't as important about what had happened in the past, but it is lot more important about what lies ahead in the future. Although we need to learn from the history of the past, but the purpose of doing that is still for the future.

2) Easier to say than do: While most people with reasonable mind would agree with this man, but many of us still live in the past more than in the future. In a comedic song: *The Land that Makes Me Me*, the writer ascribed to the facts that we all are products of our past in ways we can't imagine. None of us can completely detach our life from the past, but living in the past or by the draw of the past is pitiful at best, and hopeless at worst. In the scripture of today's message, Apostle Paul beautifully expressed his better choice: While not forgetting the past, he focused his life on the future. The problem isn't on our mental power to make choices, it is in the habit how we live: Many of us continue to live in the past: our past experience, old goals of life, old habits, old ways of life style in the fresh and the world before we become children of God. God wants us to become “new creation that the old has passed, and the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

PITFALLS OF STAYING IN THE PAST: History may be a good source of learning, there are many pitfalls if we stay our lives in the past.

1) Stay on past success: Many people love to live in their past success, be it real or exaggerated. The joke of “The fish I've almost caught” tells it all. No one may dispute the importance of counting past achievements, but living in it could generate too much pride that is a serious obstacle to future growth. History of your success looks better when others talk, write or repeat them

for you, instead of your non-stop of telling them. People who can only talk about their past success usually don't have much to talk about for life tomorrow.

2) Stay on past failures: To fail is being human and is inevitable, but to stay in past failures is self-inflicted torture. Learning from failures is all we need and can do, but continuing to lick the wounds of failures can only diminish the hope of your future. If a baby is frightened so much of his falling when he begins to walk, he will never learn to walk the rest of his life. Past failures can be good stepping stones to help us climb higher if we refuse to stay in them.

3) Stop stay in yesterday: The purpose of yesterday is today. It is important to have yesterday so we can have today. But if we continue to live in yesterday, for whatever reason, we waste the opportunity of living today and tomorrow. While every day of life in the past is important, be it a success or a failure, none of them may compete with today and tomorrow. We already know what it was or happened yesterday, but no one may know what may happen today and tomorrow, what we call: future. Future is so precious to everyone.

### BLESSINGS OF LIVING IN TOMORROW:

1) Tomorrow is about future: How nice to be thankful we should be that we have tomorrow because it represents hope and hope is the anchor of life. If life isn't as good as we want to be yesterday or even today, we still have hope that it could get better tomorrow. Life is practically dead and hopeless if it ceases to have hope of tomorrow. Stories were told, books were written on the blessings of hope for having tomorrow. When there is no tomorrow, there isn't hope for life. Chapter 11 in the Book of Hebrews is called "the chapter of faith," in fact faith is "hope of tomorrow." When you have faith, you look for tomorrow and all its possibilities.

2) Tomorrow is for potential: God has given to each person potential of life no one may imagine or fully understand. Potential usually is materialized in span of time in the future. Without tomorrow potential is useless. Certainly no one may guarantee full development of potential in any life, but it is possible if there is tomorrow. Putting tomorrow with potential, anything can happen to any life.

3) Tomorrow is a new beginning: Many people wait till some special day like New Year or a birthday to begin a new life, new habit, new resolution. While it is always good to have new start on special days, but why not start a new beginning tomorrow? You don't have to wait for a special day to start something new or important, you can start it any day like tomorrow.

## EMBRACE TOMORROW LIKE PAUL: (Phil 3:12-13)

Apostle Paul was a man of tomorrow. The four books, including the Philippians, were written in his later years of life in the prison. From human point of view, Paul didn't have much time or hope of freedom, but he never allowed limitation of age or environment to stop him from hope in tomorrow. Paul is a great example in his fervent love of life and hope of tomorrow even to the end of his life.

1) He didn't live in his past: “Not that I have already achieved all this or have already made perfect.” (3:12) If Paul had not achieved all in the mission God called him to, and had not made perfect in his spiritual life, I don't know who else is the one could claim he has. With fair consideration, Paul had achieved tons more than anyone in history, and he was made so close to perfection in spiritual maturity. What he says here isn't about his denial in both cases but is about his perspective of life: He didn't look at his life from the perspective of the past, even the past is so glorious. This is something many of us need to learn. Some of God's people love to use their past achievements as excuse that they had done enough and now they deserve “retirement” from serving the Lord. These people see Christian service as being enlisted, and when they have served the full term and are honorably discharged, they stop serving and growing. But that isn't the attitude of Paul. Regardless of what may have been achieved in the past, he isn't done in serving the Lord in the future.

2) He didn't live for himself: “But I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” (3:12b) When Paul stopped focusing his life in the past, but pressed on the future, he didn't do it to achieve what he wanted to achieve, but what the Lord Jesus wanted him to achieve. This is very important to all who were called to serve the Lord: We shouldn't try to achieve our goals of life in serving the Lord, but to achieve the goal the Lord has set for us to achieve. We are serving him on his purpose, not our purpose, his goals, not our goals. Yes we may emphasize on the importance of “press on” in this sentence, but I rather focus on the goal of his pressing on to achieve, the goal of God in his life. Any time we have our own selfish purpose or goal in serving the Lord, we strayed away from the purpose of God. Seek and do what God wants, not what we want.

3) But he lived for tomorrow: “Brothers, I do not consider yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining what is ahead.” (3:13) Paul never allowed his past to become his focus of life whatever it may be. His goal of life is to strain forward to the future, tomorrow

and the day after, new horizon, new hope, new possibility, new potential and new frontier. There is no end or limit what the Lord may have him to take hold of. This is something many of us had failed: We are influenced by our past success or failure, the good and the bad, the happy and the sad. We are to follow Paul's example: Forget our past whatever it may be, we need to let them get behind us, so we may have a clear vision and purpose for tomorrow. Until we can forget all in the past, even things we may be proud of like what Paul had given up in 3:4-8, his pursuit on personal merit, we can't have much progress in our pursuit of tomorrow because we will be carrying the heavy burden of our past along the way.

### TAKING STEPS FOR TOMORROW: (3:14-15)

1) Setting a goal for perfection: “Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded. (have the same mind)” (3:15, Scofield) “Perfect”, *katartizo* in Greek, means to reach a goal or purpose of perfection. When “perfect” is used for man in the Bible, it doesn't mean sinless or blameless, it means we are in position and potential to become perfect because of the new life in us. (2 Cor 5:17) Here Paul wanted his readers and us to know we need to have a goal to achieve the purpose of God in our life, all the way to be perfect. This is something every Christian needs to have and to work on. God's people can't stay the same yesterday or today or tomorrow. Paul says he was striving or straining forward to achieve the goal of God in his life to be perfect in His eyes. No matter what spiritual condition you may think you are in, you always have rooms to improve, to do better, move higher and achieve more, until you are perfect to the eyes of the Lord. “Be thus mind” means “to have the same mindset.” All Christians need to have the same mind to strive for perfection, no one may be left out or exempted from.

2) Be watchful of distraction: “And if at some point, you think differently.” (3:15:b) If you have been a dedicated Christian, looking for opportunity to grow, to serve, to glorify God, I am sure you know that it isn't easy to set goals of our lives on positive view for perfection. It is much harder to keep the goal alive and vibrant. Paul understands our struggle, so, he give us a warning that we may be tempted to “think differently” than to think God's way in terms of the future of spiritual condition. The path to stronger spiritual growth is never an easy way. It is never a wide and open highway, but a narrow and winding small trail. Jesus warned his disciples of the choices they will face and the right choice they must make to enter the narrow way

because it will lead to eternal life. (Matthew 7:13-14) Worldly temptation, evil desires of the sinful flesh and the power of our old nature, are all distractions we face everyday to sway us into “think differently.” This is a real and present danger all God's people face everyday, including long time dedicated servants of God and once faithful leaders in God's church. If Satan can bring down one of these leaders, he can do a lot of harm to God's work in this world.

3) Seek protection from God: “That too God will make it clear to you.” (3:15c) Whenever and whatever may blur our focus on the future, God has promised to show us his clear vision that will lead us on the right path. There will be many side ways and hidden trails we may encounter, that is the time we need to seek God to protect us from straying away from the future He has set for each one of us. Never try to walk this path all by yourself.

#### APPLICATION OF TRUTH:

1) Time for self examination: “Jesus replied: No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62) I strongly believe that we all want to be useful to God and his kingdom and we may be able to do that. One thing that may drag us down from achieving that goal is our double-mindedness: We want to hold on the plow to go forward but we are distracted to look backward from time to time. Look on your inside what are the things that are still entangling you, distracting you from serving the Lord wholeheartedly, blocking you from striving forward that you can only take one step forward, then two steps back. Is it the glamor of this world, or the evil desires of the deadly flesh, or some hidden sins still have a strong grip on your life? Bring all of them to God, repent, ask for forgiveness and let God set you straight again for a victorious new future.

2) There is a prize for you: “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (3:14) There is a purpose and a goal God wants to see us forgetting what is behind and strive what is ahead. He has prepared a prize waiting for you to receive. Whatever we may have to sacrifice on this spiritual journey, it is a worthy cost for us to pay for the prize we will receive in heaven. God is gracious and generous to all who follow His will to live their lives. Don't get side tracked in your spiritual walk